



## INDIA OF THE RAJAHS





# INDIA OF THE RAJAHS

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TO  
JOHN  
IN THE HOPE  
THAT ONE DAY HE WILL  
ALSO PUT HIS THOUGHTS ON  
PAPER



## FOREWORD

**I**NDIA is a country of such violent contrasts that, in spite of the fact of having made this book cheerful, the more grim side of life could not be avoided entirely.

Any reader seeking knowledge as to how this great, child-like country should be governed must go elsewhere : the aim of this book is to amuse and interest, and not to air my opinions.

Where stories are told of people their names are not their own.

‘FOURFACES,’

COLCHESTER.



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## CHAPTER I

AUTUMN was fading in Sind, and winter heralded its approach by occasional puffs of cold, dry wind from across the desert. Against a flaming sunset the black, restless crows on the clear, crimson, and orange sky sought a resting-place for the night as they rose and fell like notes of music. Already the kites had settled down upon their ledges on the roof-tops, where they closely resembled gargoyles.

From the small balcony of my sitting-room in the Karachi hotel I watched the sun sink rapidly behind the distant houses. The day was nearly dead and yet was being born anew. It was always dying and being reborn; in fact, its birth and death were one, and two being one there could be no difference between them. I shivered slightly and turned away.

The sitting-room was a mass of heavy shadows, in which the vivid blue from a Chinese brocade on the far wall glowed like a gem, whilst a few shining objects reflected the last glimmerings of day. The sudden glare of the electric light, however, flung the room into savage barrenness, most of my possessions being already packed. The following day I should be gone. Someone else would lie where I had lain and sit where I had sat. Was I sorry? No, definitely not, although parting from comfortable quarters has, in the past, affected me in a similar manner to the loss of a friend.



For five months I had lived in Karachi among its sex-starved youth, vapid amusements, and mediocre sports. I had met the rank-conscious service and mixed with the salary-conscious civilian, and held myself fortunate in being able to do so because I had escaped from a far worse fate. Restless, as I always am, on the eve of departure, I decided to go to the Gymkhana Club; the remainder of the packing could wait until later on. The bar of the club was empty and, after ordering my drink, I turned to one of the fruit machines; those damnable inventions which have found their way into clubs in India. Having lost small sums on these machines, and this being my last night, I was determined to come away with something in my pocket. Within ten minutes I was richer by forty rupees and for the risk of only two; a satisfactory and most unusual proceeding. An acquaintance now came into the bar, and I turned away from further temptation.

"How's life?" he inquired, after expressing pleasure at the news of my good fortune.

"Not so bad," I replied. "I'm off on two months' leave."

The man looked surprised.

"I thought you were going home."

"So did I, but fate, or whatever you like to call it, has decreed otherwise, so I am now going to have a look at Central India and the South."

"What spots are you going to?" he inquired.

"I am really not quite sure, but I shall make for Jodhpur and Jaipur first of all, and then go on to Agra and Delhi. Then I want to have a real good look at the Indian States and so work my way down south,

and perhaps cross over into Ceylon. But I am not at all sure."

"But do you really mean to say that you've not made any definite plans?"

"No, I rarely do. I find the roughest of itineraries is far the best. If you make hard and unalterable plans to stay for so long in each place, you find either you are bored to tears, or extremely sorry to have to leave the place you happen to be in. I stay just as long as a place interests me, within reason, of course."

"I could never do that," replied my companion, ordering two more chota pegs. "I should feel so unsettled, and you never know where you are, going on like that."

"But that's much of the fun. I've found myself in the oddest places, and adventure is always just round the corner."

"But you don't have adventures, do you? Not at your age. That belongs to the twenties."

"Not so much of the age," I said sharply. "I mayn't be twenty, but I do have what are adventures to me. To you they would probably be extremely uncomfortable experiences. It is just how you look at it."

"What do you call an adventure which would be uncomfortable to me?"

I thought for a moment.

"Riding in the lowest class on a Chinese-owned and run railway, with the carriage packed with peasants, and food vendors cooking their wares in the gangway between the seats. Beside you would be a particularly filthy coolie, and opposite a young peasant matron suckling a smelly baby."

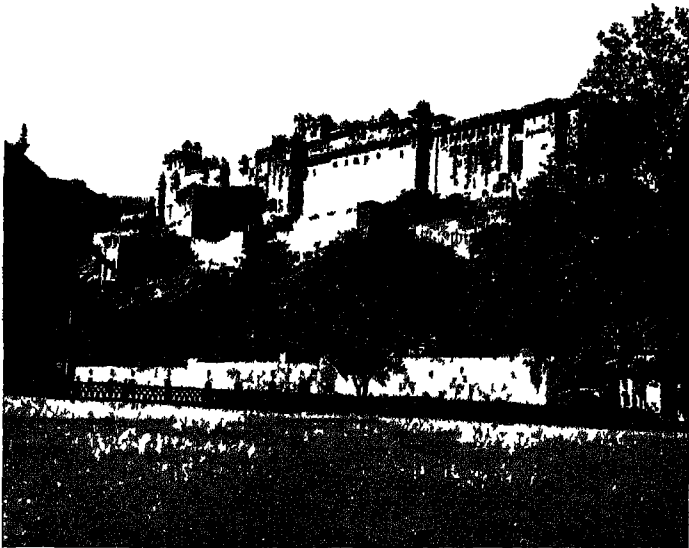
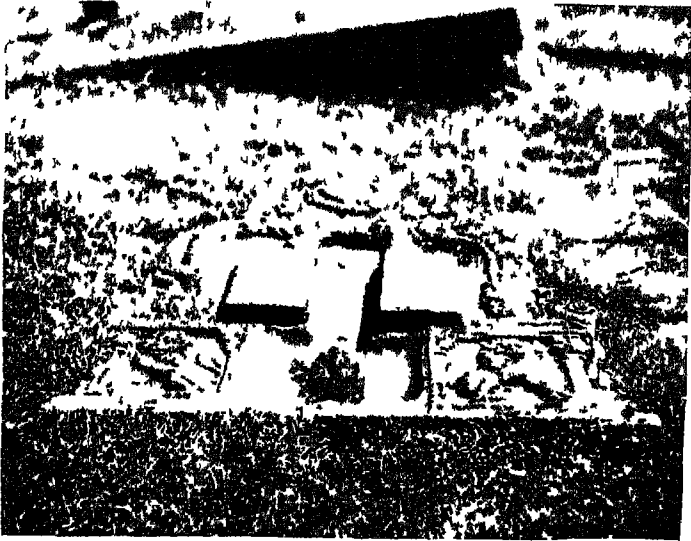
"Have you really done that?" inquired my companion doubtfully.

"Yes I have, and for six hours it was, and I prize it as being one of my most interesting experiences."

"Well, perhaps you are right after all. I could never have endured that unless I had had to do so."

The following morning my young bearer brought in the early morning tea, and I awoke to realize that the day was an auspicious one. Pouring out the tea I lit a cigarette, and leaving the bed, took up the cup and saucer and went out on to the balcony of my sitting-room. The city was coming to life, and the roadway below bore witness to the fact. A bearer was carrying a tea-tray across to his master in the hotel annex; a stray dog had come upon a ginger cat at its early ablutions and the cat, hastily leaving its toilet, said what it thought of wandering vagrants; Indians, both on foot and on bicycles, passed to and fro; and then two tiny infants appeared upon the scene as they struggled to drag along a large, and I suspected, looted branch of a tree. I smiled as I watched their exertions, because it was the youngest who was in charge of the operation, and he did not fail to give much advice.

In the air was a cool, fresh balminess which was infinitely soothing after the tiresome heat of the past months. A sense of exaltation rose up in me. From now onwards there was freedom—I could do as I wished all the hours of the day. The packing was finished, and in the forenoon would begin the wandering up and down India. Where should I go? Whom should I meet? What adventures awaited me? Should I end up in Assam or Ceylon? Both were exciting.



(Top) AN UNUSUALLY HIGHLY-ORNAMENTED LATRINE  
AT ANURADIAPURA, USED SOME TWO THOUSAND  
YEARS AGO

(Bottom) THE PALACE AT AMBER



Perhaps during these wanderings I might be able to see dimly across that unbridgeable gulf which separates the Oriental from the Occidental, which we in India have tried so hard to cross and with such lamentable failure. I was fortunate in realizing that I knew little or nothing concerning the side of the Indian which he keeps hidden from the European; and how exciting it would be if I were permitted a few peeps behind the scenes.

It was pleasant to stand as I was doing with the cigarette, tea, and enthusiastic anticipation. Agra and Delhi again after sixteen years, and those fascinating Indian States of which the ordinary man knows so little. I then remembered the remarks passed by my companion of the night before regarding my age, and therefore supposedly dulled sense of enjoyment, brought about by countless lost illusions. What nonsense that was! He was one of those worthy people who always misuse that old saying: 'Those whom the Gods love die young.' This refers to spirit and not to years.

The train leaving Karachi for Jodhpur, that large Indian State in Rajputana, situated on the eastern edge of the Sind Desert, started at 12.30 p.m., and as is the rule, my bearer Mullu Ram had arranged to take my luggage to the station at least two hours beforehand. Indians who are to make a long train journey often arrive upon the platform half a day before the actual time of departure, where they camp out on the sidings, or in the station hall; and this is especially so with families or parties. Why wait at home when there may be all kinds of exciting things taking place on the station? It is interesting to note that many

Europeans are firmly under the impression that wives in India are utterly dominated by their husbands, and that they are little more than slaves, or drudges. But stand for any length of time on the platform of an important railway centre, and you will see how false this is. Scores of husbands are being bullied and screamed at by agitated and excited wives, and they are ordered off to do this, or that, and they do so without a murmur of protest. They wear worried expressions, and those near by smile as they listen to the streams of abuse, all of which is grossly personal. Something has, invariably, been mislaid or forgotten, and the matter is commented upon from every angle.

Travelling by train in India, in the case of Expresses, unless by the main-line expresses, is not to be undertaken lightly or in the spirit of abandon, and to illustrate this, I give in some detail my journey to Jodhpur, a distance of four hundred miles, most of which was by metre gauge.

On arrival at the station I found Mullu Ram squatting on the roadside below a flight of steps leading up to the station hall, and he was surrounded by my belongings. He was holding a casual conversation with a youth in a pair of grubby white cotton trousers and a flaming shirt. On sighting me he arose, and my near approach became the signal for a mob of coolies to descend upon us. Yelling, they fought among themselves for the right to carry my luggage. They scrabbled on the ground, and two of them attempted to tear one of the suit-cases in half. In this mêlée of quarter-clad, dusty, slightly smelly humanity I waited for the bearer to rescue me. With curses and blows from his fist he dispersed the mob, after

having selected the minimum number of coolies required, and I was then able to walk up the steps and into the station hall. Here was pandemonium, in which, amid the assortment of bundles, aged tin trunks, and baskets of smelling-to-heaven fish, would-be Indian travellers seethed together. Old men, young men, and filthy-faced children; mothers, aunts, cousins, fathers, and grandmothers, were each determined to get the maximum amount of thrill from the preparations for the journey. Men shouted; women screamed like peacocks; whilst railway officials gave advice, chided the impetuous, and even roughly handled those who tried to push through the iron gates on to the platform without showing a ticket.

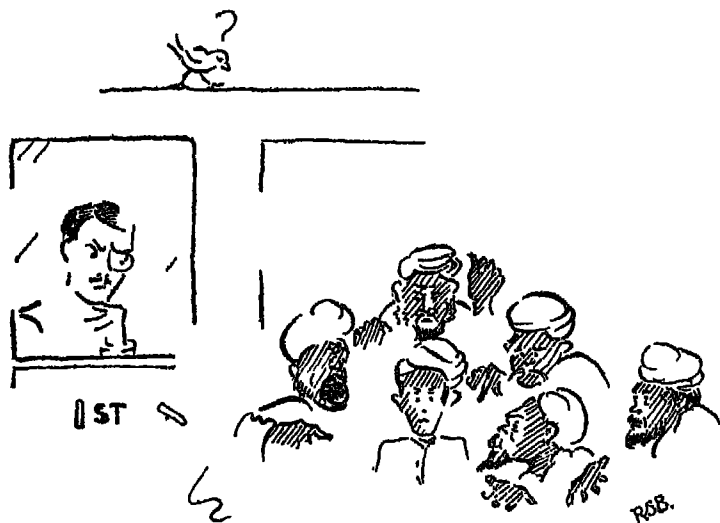
At the booking-office there was yet another basket of fish at my feet, beside which was squatting a young mother suckling her bright-eyed child. She wriggled to one side, I was handed my ticket, and so went on to the platform where there was comparative peace. Travellers now squatted quietly beside their belongings, whilst the vendors of cooked foods, fruit, milk, and water cried their wares, as they moved to and fro under a blazing sun.

When the train drew in everyone rose to his feet, and another turmoil ensued. Those who wished to get off the train struggled with those who desired their vacant seats. Men and women, clutching their offspring and bundles, tore up and down searching for room in the long, third class coaches. Children, belongings, or relations, became lost or mislaid, and were sought with increasing despair and the maximum use of the voice.

Walking slowly towards the first class compartments,



I saw the bearer directing the luggage to be put into a vacant compartment. Pushing by I got inside and prepared to settle down, but my attention was attracted by an outcry from the coolies, who were surrounding the bearer and screaming at him ; those who did not scream chattered like intoxicated apes. Inquiries concerning the trouble brought



out the fact that they were demanding three annas each. I told the bearer to give them two and to get rid of them ; and they, having heard my order, accepted it and departed.

First class compartments on most Indian railways are not comfortable, being invariably very old, and doubtfully clean ; and the only advantage over the second class is that you do get a little more room, and rarely have more than two persons to a compartment ; the lower class is often packed tightly with a very varied

assortment of people of all classes and types. The compartments consist of two long seats placed opposite to each other, and above them are bunks which can be let down for use at night. There are a toilet, two extremely hard and grubby arm-chairs, various pegs, two high-speed fans, and various lights. The windows have a wooden shutter, a gauze, and ordinary glass, and each can be used as desired. If there be only two occupants they sit lengthways along the seats with the back against a board-like rest ; but retiring for the night with four people present, each accompanied by swollen baggage, can be a strange, tangled business, not without humour if you can appreciate it.

The train gathered speed, and tore past the airport with its vast shed, built but never used for airships, and so out into that dreary land which stretches for so many miles into the north and north-east. The ochre-coloured, sandy earth is torn with dry water-courses, and strewn with small stones, and rises at times to long, low ridges, and even to small hills. There is just enough scrub growing to accentuate the desolation, on which a few thin cows and goats hunt for patches of dried grass ; how they ever find enough to keep themselves alive is astonishing. This country, which was once beneath the sea, as the numerous fossils bear witness, is a godless and unclean land with an atmosphere which is not found in true deserts, with their unblemished and wind-swept sand and stately palms. In summer this stretch of line, as far as Sibi at the foot of the Bolan Pass and Multan in the North, becomes a furnace with temperatures rising to over 130 degrees in the shade.

At Hyderabad I had to change on to the metre-

gauge Jodhpur State Railway, and in due course we drew out, to begin our long journey across the desert. At seven o'clock in the evening we stopped at a large station on the frontier of Jodhpur State, and opposite to where I was sitting, and under a flaming torch, was a vendor of fruit standing beside his laden barrow. There were piles of golden oranges, Kabuli grapes, pomegranates, and bananas, heaped upon it, and idly I watched several travellers examine the wares. One man, who was obviously prosperous, desired some fruit, and he picked up several pomegranates one after the other, feeling and examining them. He then inquired their price, and on being told put them down hurriedly and turned to the grapes, while the vendor stood with an expressionless face waiting for a selection to be made. The problem, however, appeared to be a serious one because a friend of the purchaser was called upon to assist. A solemn and dignified conference now took place, and at last a bunch of grapes was selected and duly weighed. A few copper coins were produced from a knotted piece of cotton cloth, and the transaction was completed to everyone's satisfaction; but it had taken exactly six minutes to buy those grapes.

I stated that the buyer of grapes was a prosperous man; an interesting fact lay behind that remark. Middle, or lower-class, Indians rarely admit to owning wealth or property and the only means a European, or in fact anyone, has of telling their circumstances is by their size. The man in question was no different in dress or bearing from a hundred others on the platform; but he was decidedly plump. Eighty per cent of Indians are as thin as underfed cows, but give them

a good job with ample pay and they swell in a very short space of time—a fact they cannot hide however much they may try to do so.

After a vile meal in the restaurant car I returned to my compartment, to find that Mullu Ram had laid out my bedding and generally prepared me for the night before returning to the servants' compartment near by, which was the size of a small hen-house. Knowing that I should suffer from that meal I took several indigestion tablets, and then retired to bed to read.

The train rocked and crashed through the starlit night, across the desert which is true desert with its rolling banks of sand, camels, and low, lean thorn. Before turning over to sleep I turned out the lights and gazed out across the night to where, many miles away in the heart of the Sind Desert, lay the romantic, walled and robber city of Jesselmere. In the bad old days this city was built from the proceeds gained from robbing caravans and, being difficult to get at, it was a safe stronghold.

After a restless night I awoke at 6 a.m. to find that the entire compartment was covered with a thick layer of dust. It was also in my hair, nostrils, throat, and eyes. My face felt like fine sandpaper, I badly needed a drink, and was forced to clear my nose with vigour. Having to change trains at 7 a.m. I arose, and went to wash in the toilet—a most unsatisfactory proceeding. The swaying of the train caused the water in the bowl to splash madly in all directions, its colour was a light brown, and I staggered drunkenly to and fro as I strove to lather my face. I got soap suds in my eyes, barked my shins against the closet, bumped my head

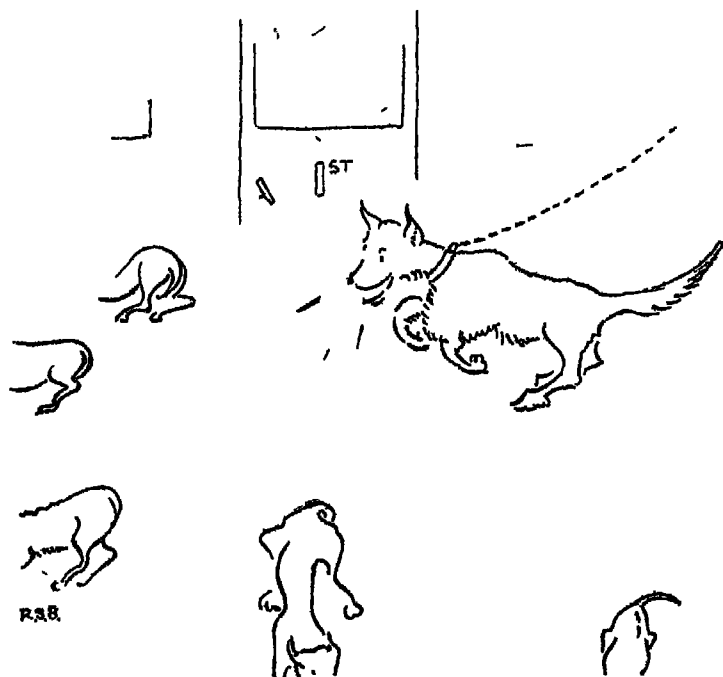
against the mirror, and then dropped the soap on to the dirty floor. I managed to shave well enough to appear in public, and returning to the compartment I shook the dust from my clothes and put them on. I felt, as one does on such occasions, that neither I nor my clothes would ever be clean again.

Sitting on the untidy bedding, I looked out over what was now a flat country well sprinkled with thorn trees, not unlike an African landscape. At intervals there were piles of whitening bones upon which sat one or more vultures. Being still sleepy, decidedly frousty, and without morning tea, I smoked a cigarette and regarded the rosy dawn with a jaundiced eye. At Luni Junction, where I had to change, I knew there would be tea, after which I should be able to face the day, perhaps even with pleasure.

Leaving Mullu Ram to pack up and to transfer the luggage, I got out at the junction and went in search of that very badly needed tea. There was no tea—not a trace of it. This disaster was more than I felt could be borne, and, after cussing several surprised railway officials I retired to my new carriage and sulked. What a ghastly country India was. Why had I come to it? Why was I not on my way home instead of gallivanting across a dusty, tea-less country? Filled with self-pity and glowering with hate at the world in general, I was brought back to realities by a small dark face appearing at a window and inquiring if I desired morning tea. It appeared that I could have some from the restaurant of a train which had just come in from somewhere else.

“Yes, O bringer of good news,” I exclaimed.  
“Bring much and swiftly.”

The boy looked puzzled, but hurried away to return with a tiny pot of tea and equally diminutive accompaniments. Like a cloud passing from across the face of the full moon my evil temper faded, and I was able to appreciate an amusing scene which was being enacted a short distance away. A fine and large Alsatian dog was being walked up and down the platform at the end of a thin chain by his Indian master. At nearly every Indian station there are at least half a dozen pariah dogs of extreme leanness who wander up and down beside the stationary train, or between the lines, searching for food which has been flung from the carriage windows. One of these pariahs spied the Alsatian and gave tongue, with the result that instantly



eight other pariahs appeared from under trains and around corners. At a safe distance they stood with hackles erect and said what they thought of the common enemy, who, doubtless, was only there to poach upon their preserves.

In a semicircle they slowly drew nearer, each dog turning its head continually from side to side to see that he had not been left alone. The Alsatian treated them with utter disdain, until one of them must have flung at him an unbearable insult, because he spun round and made a bound at the nearest pariah. But there were no pariahs, they having departed with quite incredible speed. The owner of the Alsatian smiled and said something to him, and the dog grinned and wagged his tail.

. . . . .

Between Luni Junction and Jodhpur station I studied something of the history of the state I was about to visit, and I give a few of the details, because without them there would be no background to my remarks on what I found there.

The history and general conditions of all Indian states is, without exception, centred around the ruling house. The present ruler of Jodhpur is Lieutenant-Colonel His Highness Raj Rajeshwar Saramad Rajai Hind Mahara Maharajah Dhiirij Sri Sir Umaid Singhji Bahadur, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., K.C.V.O., all of which is no mean title to carry through life. He comes of the Rathors, who are a branch of the great Solar race, the foremost of the Rajput clans.

The first ruler of this state, who was also its founder, reigned from 1227 until 1273 and the line has descended

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unbroken. The present ruler is a man of very high ideals and character, and this is instantly apparent, even to the casual visitor to his domain, because nearly every Indian state is a mirror of its ruler, as will be seen when I come to speak of other states. His Highness has always taken a very deep and real interest in the welfare of his people, and has many advanced ideas. For example, the hospital in the capital is a model of what such institutions should be in India, and I will speak of the splendid aerodrome. He is an airman of no mean skill, a keen pig-sticker and polo-player, and a general sportsman. He is, however, an extremely shy and reserved man, rarely appearing in public and avoiding the limelight as far as he is able.

The state is the largest in Rajputana, having an area of thirty-six thousand square miles with a population of about twenty-one millions, 90 per cent of whom are Hindus. Much of the country is sandy and poor, but it contains several important natural resources, such as salt, and the famous Makrana quarries, from which the marble came to build the Taj Mahal; there is also lime, sandstone, gypsum, and timber. There are, of course, the usual agricultural pursuits, together with weaving, carving, pottery, and metal workers. Because the ruler of this state conserves the revenue and uses it for the benefit of the country instead of squandering most of it on his own selfish desires, it is prosperous and the people contented.

Arrival at Jodhpur station was the signal for the usual riot, but as I got down out of my carriage I noticed a small group of aristocratic Indians standing quietly to one side. They were a gay splash of colour in their long brocaded coats and coloured turbans, and



were evidently waiting for the arrival, or departure, of some personage. They spoke quietly among themselves and glanced at the surging crowds with expressionless faces and eyes.

When Mullu Ram and I had collected all the luggage, we found ourselves outside the station and on a semi-circular open space, at the far end of which was a main road lined with rather shabby, open-fronted shops. Carts, bicycles, motor cars, and pedestrians moved to and fro with the maximum amount of agitation. Near by were also stray dogs, wandering vagrants, a few cows, and several dirty urchins. Underfoot was thick, pale-yellow dust, and overhead a clear sky in which were still lingering a few rosy dawn clouds.

I looked about for a motor car which could be hired, but there was none, and in their place were hordes of single-horsed gharrys, some of which were so dilapidated that they looked as if they might disintegrate at any moment. Their drivers, dozens of them, scenting a wealthy fare, whipped up the horses and charged down upon me, and circled round until they made me feel giddy. They shouted, begged, and even screamed to be allowed to convey my God-like person to the hotel, but I refused them all, knowing that the hotel was some distance away and I needed some breakfast quickly. An urchin standing near by at last inquired if I wanted a taxi, and on being told that this was the case he fled away, to return in a few moments with quite a respectable car into which I climbed.

The road led under the railway, and so out into the cantonment area, which was filled with shady trees, areas of bright green grass, and many flowering shrubs ;

but rarely have I seen so many roads in such a limited space, all of which crossed and re-crossed each other in a most confusing manner. It was true that the hotel was a long distance from the station, but when we reached it I was pleasantly surprised at its fine appearance and air of luxurious comfort. A high, much-ornamented building of red sandstone, it stood in pleasant grounds and facing the splendid aerodrome. On being shown to my bedroom I felt that this was not really India, but some European hotel, because here the furnishing was better than I have found anywhere in India, before or since.

Being badly in need of breakfast, it now being close upon nine-thirty, I did not bother to have a bath and a change, but went straight to the charming dining-room, where I was firmly led to a table at which two elegant young men were finishing their meal. They instantly regarded me as an offence and an intrusion, and had they been women they would have drawn away their skirts. Being aware of my slightly dishevelled condition I grinned to myself and prepared to give as good as I received. At the first opportunity I asked one of the men to pass the salt, but in a voice that left no illusions regarding my feelings. A few moments later, and after furtive glances in my direction, they decided that perhaps after all I was not as bad as I looked ; they even made feeble attempts to be agreeable. I heard afterwards that they described me as being conceited and a snob.

Before leaving Karachi I had accepted one or two letters of introduction. This was not my usual practice, preferring people to be nice to me because they liked me and not because they felt they had to be.

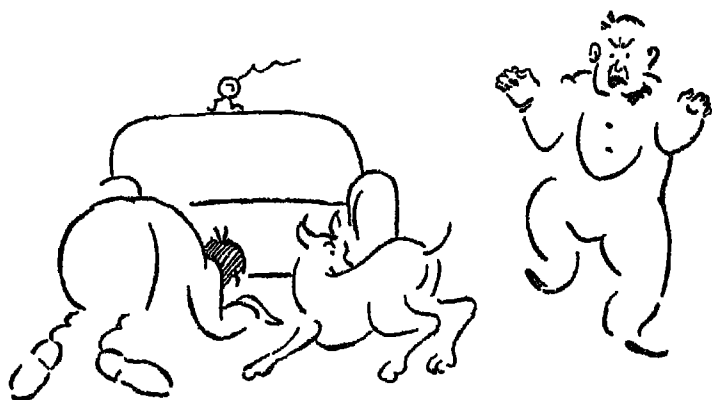
Those who live in India suffer more than a little at the hands of persons who so casually fling about letters of introduction. It is easy, in a moment of expansion, to scribble a few lines concerning an acquaintance about whom you really know very little. The unfortunate person who ultimately receives those lines is forced, in most cases, to do what he can for a complete stranger, and often with dire results. It is not nearly as rare as might be thought, for those armed with letters of introduction to arrive in a station where they treat your house as an hotel; abuse your servants; adversely criticize those whom you ask to meet them; consume large quantities of your expensive liquor, and, finally, depart with a casual word of thanks. Kipling once wrote a story on this subject, but from a different angle.

Later in the morning, when bathed and changed, I felt I was going to like Jodhpur, and decided that I would use one of my letters of introduction and see what happened. By means of a telephone I explained to a woman that I held a letter from a friend of hers and asked if she would come and have luncheon with me in the hotel. This she refused, but stated that she would come around and see me. She arrived in due course, and turned out to be charming and amusing, as well as clever, but the result of her visit was surprising. Within a quarter of an hour of our having sat down in two cane chairs on the veranda of the hotel we were the centre of a large party of people who had drifted up by ones and twos to greet my acquaintance. There was a Russian engineer, an Italian, and an Indian doctor; the woman's husband, a man in oil, another in tobacco, the officer in charge of the local

cavalry, and three other men whose professions I did not know. They sat in a semicircle where they talked incessantly, and plied me with much strong drink, besides demanding answers to streams of questions. Where had I come from, and where was I going? How long was I staying, and how did I like Jodhpur? Did I not think the aerodrome very fine, and was I going to write my name in His Highness' book? When not answering questions I was refusing drink, and I wagged my head from side to side as I sought to answer two people at the same time. At one-fifteen, dazed, partly by drink, and partly by this hurricane of talk, I broke away, but not before I had accepted an invitation to dine with my new acquaintance and her husband, after which I was to be taken to see the illuminations.

At seven-thirty a car arrived at the hotel and I was carried off to a distant bungalow, where, after being shown into a pleasant drawing-room, I was joined by my hostess' husband who was a plump and normally jovial person, but at this time he was in a state of great agitation. He wore an eyeglass, and it appeared that during his afternoon siesta on a chesterfield the glass had most mysteriously disappeared. A thorough search by the whole of the large Indian staff had failed to locate it, and my host stated that, as he was dining elsewhere, it would be quite impossible for him to go without it. The result of this was that for twenty minutes I crawled about the room on my hands and knees, as I searched under chairs and tables, behind bookcases, under carpets, behind curtains, and other furnishings, whilst the man strode up and down the room bemoaning his loss with bitterness and loud

complaint. The search on my part was complicated by the fact that a large yellow dog was under the impression that I was playing with him. I gave up at



R.B.

last and on inquiring if he had any spare glasses was told that he had used them all, although a new lot were at that moment in the post office, but, the place being closed on account of the Dewali festival, he would not be able to lay hands upon them for three days.

My hostess then appeared on the scene and laughingly drove her husband off to his dinner-party without his glass—he left the bungalow almost tearfully. I learned the following day that the missing eyeglass had been found in the lining of a coat where it had with devilish cunning managed to hide itself.

After dinner a small party of us set out to see the illuminations which were said to be unique. Jodhpur city clusters beneath a huge, four-hundred-foot-high hill, upon which is set a magnificent fort, and it was from an open space close to its gateway that we were to

look down upon the city. The night was clear, calm, and starlit as we got out of the car and stood beside a low protecting wall, and gazed down upon a sight which took away my breath.

At the yearly Hindu festival of Dewali every householder lines the top of his flat roof with rows of tiny, clear-burning oil-lamps, whilst every large building is festooned with strings of electric bulbs, none of which is coloured. The combination of thousand upon thousand of these scintillating lights on the compact roof-tops was stupendous. It was as if all the stars of heaven had congregated below to honour this city—it was a city of diamonds—a city upon which a cloth of celestial weaving had been laid. In a great blazing semicircle the uneven roofs stretched away towards the cantonment area, to become lost in the trees through which lights flickered like fireflies.

For a long time we stood silently drinking in the loveliness, and for a few moments I knew that, once again, I was touching the fringes of the sublime. Sudden puffs of breeze brought mysterious and fragrant perfumes from hidden flowers and scented trees. Mingled with it was that indefinable but exciting smell of an Eastern city, which is by no means as unpleasant as some people would have us believe. Then, slowly but with certainty, the lights began to flicker and burn out, and in a short time all that remained was the purple cloth slashed with the golden reflection of narrow, brilliantly lighted streets.

Deeply moved we got into the car and went down the hill and into the city, where, from a dream I was flung headlong into a nightmare, from which I emerged shaken and trembling. The streets of the city were

very narrow, and filled with gay, laughing, and gorgeously clad crowds, who sauntered up and down chattering and singing. They resembled a crowd scene as shown on a London stage in an expensive Eastern production, where scarlet turbans and golden and primrose shawls were much favoured, as were blood-red jackets which clashed with brilliant greens and blues ; but it was all shades of magenta that were the most common. I would have much liked to have been able to get out of the car and to walk among these gay people, but instead I was forced to cling to the side of it, and tremble with nervousness. The car, which was a very large open tourer, was driven with complete abandon by a one-eyed and one-armed man, to whom it belonged. With screaming horn we charged the crowds, who skipped, fled, and scattered in all directions. Men squeezed themselves tightly against the booths, ran into shop doorways, and hurried down side turnings, and, curiously enough, all appeared to accept it as a great jest. And so at thirty miles an hour we progressed, and why at least fifty people were not slain outright I failed to understand. One ancient was touched by the nearside mudguard, but he was so sprightly that he leapt upwards and sideways, to land sprawling across the wares of a cloth merchant. He lost his turban and everyone laughed at him, and more astonishing still he himself turned his head and grinned a toothless grin at us. Later I inquired why such speed was necessary and was told that no one drove slowly through the city, and to do so was to show that you were a person of no consequence, for whom no one would make way. I nodded, realizing how very typical this was of the Orient, where you are

judged entirely by pomp and circumstance, and never by concealed virtue or humble intelligence. It seems to me a pity that more of our young administrators are not firmly impressed by this fact during their early training—their paths would lead down walks far less strewn with stones of offence.

Once again in the hotel, and in bed, I lay and gazed up at a strip of violet sky peeping through the parting in my silken curtains, and thought over the events of that most unusual day, with the acute discomfort of the sandy carriage to the luxury of the present surroundings ; the strange party before luncheon, and the final, glorious evening. It was an excellent beginning, but if future events moved as rapidly I should be exhausted long before my holiday was completed.

I slept, only to be abruptly awakened some hours later by a strange and most awe-inspiring noise—it was in fact much more than a noise, resembling the roaring of many loud-voiced lions. It was a sound that seemed to come from all directions, and it played violent touch and run with the articles of furniture in the room, including the bed. What on earth could it be—not an earthquake, surely ? Then, growing more fully awake, I realized what it was ; it was the arrival of an air liner upon the aerodrome.

Peace restored I slept again, only to be awakened once more, but this time by quite a different kind of sound. Somewhere close to my window, which was on the ground floor, had come a stray ass. That ass was braying—how it brayed, and the shattering fanfare shook the bed, and so continuous was it that I arose to wreak my vengeance upon that wandering songster. An outraged dog, however, did it for me, but judging



from a sudden and pained yelp he had received a hoof in his ribs ; the ass now departed elsewhere and I completed my disturbed rest.

Jodhpur city, without stretching the imagination too far, can be compared to a seashore in rough weather. Against the lower, boulder-strewn slopes of the hill, upon which stands the fort, the masses of white, compact houses cream in a great semicircle, like broken surf at the foot of rocks, and beyond them are the rolling waves of green trees representing the calmer and deeper waters.

The fort dominates everything, rising in gigantic and solitary grandeur from its base of solid, barren rock, and so wonderful is the workmanship that it is not at all easy to see where the rock ends and the walls begin. The vast, rounded buttresses, and high battlements, which are on an average seventy feet thick, enclose a space of about one hundred and twenty thousand square yards, in which are barracks, palaces, store-houses, and magazines. The end nearest to the main gateway is crowned with a mass of buildings, which constitute the palaces with their innumerable latticed windows and tiny balconies.

When built, five hundred years ago, a man named Rajia, according to custom, was buried alive in the foundations of the fort, so that good fortune should attend its defenders, and the place should never fall to an invader. It has never done so, and perhaps this man was not sacrificed in vain. It is interesting to note that the victim in such cases was always drugged and so did not know much about his horrible death.

The fort is still regarded as a palace, although not

used as such, and visitors who wish to visit it must bow to one or two rather quaint regulations, which include : not carrying umbrellas or sunshades ; dark glasses may not be worn ; and in the case of men shorts are forbidden. The interior is not of any great interest, although there are a number of very unusual arms and fire-arms.

The streets of the city, although perhaps not as fascinating as might be expected, were remarkably clean and tidy, and even the tiny lanes and back alleys were free of rubbish and smells. I watched the busy, prosperous people, peeped into the tiny courtyards of their houses and tried to visualize the kind of life that was lived in them. If the truth were known these people lived happy, simple, and uncomplicated lives, with far more home comforts than is generally supposed to be the case. What more does the average Indian require than an industrious wife who will keep his house properly and produce children for him ; enough to eat and the occasional jollity of a festival or a marriage feast ?

Many European visitors would have been considerably embarrassed by the small crowd which followed at my heels during my peregrinations. Consisting mainly of small boys, their very audible remarks concerning myself were personal and boyish, and whenever I stopped to look at something which had caught my eye they instantly formed a semicircle about me and regarded my face with unwinking stares. For a while I kept to myself the fact that I was able to understand what they were saying.

" See the sahib stops to look at Raji the potter. He is doubtless mad. Who would watch a potter at work who was not mad ? "

"All sahibs are mad."

"This one must be a low-caste sahib because he walks alone and without a motor carriage."

"See, he carries a stick in his hand. Will he beat us?"

"Senseless as parrots. You know not what you say. Look he wears gold and fine clothes. All sahibs are rich and doubtless this one has many wives."

Grinning, I turned upon the last speaker who was a youth of about fourteen years old.

"My son, we sahibs are wiser than thou art," I said, whilst twenty pairs of eyes regarded me with astonishment. "We find that one wife causes enough trouble and do not burden ourselves with others, or with children who chatter rudely about strangers they meet in the street, as do the monkeys in the trees."

Mouths opened and eyes grew round and a few of the more timid drew away. The youth, however, hesitated and then grinned impudently as he passed an observation which convulsed the crowd with laughter, but which is unprintable. To this I replied with vigour that the contents of a tank with only one outlet lasts longer than one with many.

Yells of laughter greeted this retort and I was reported to be a witty sahib and to laugh as they did. Growing weary at last of the chattering mob I stopped, turned, and feeling in my pocket for a few anna pieces threw them high into the air above the black heads. In the riot that followed I escaped down a side alley.

During my wanderings I came upon a novel form of the potter's wheel, the like of which I had never seen before. It must be very, very old, dating back to prehistoric times. These wheels were the size and

shape of the old-fashioned stones used for grinding corn, being round, two or more feet across, thick and very heavy. Pivoted a few inches off the ground they were revolved by means of a short stick jammed into a small hole near the rim. The lump of damp clay was dumped in the centre, and when the wheel was revolving at sufficient speed the potter removed the stick and began his fashioning in the usual manner, pausing every now and again to renew the speed of his wheel. As far as I could see these articles were the only ones used.

These potters, each in themselves, were little gems of Oriental industry, with all its quaintness and efficiency, in spite of apparently slap-dash methods. They were usually to be found squatting at some alley corner where there was a small open space. Surrounded by completed and fat-bellied water-pots awaiting a buyer; odd lumps of clay and dust; broken shards and other odds and ends; at their backs were the black interiors of the tiny shops, from which, now and again, came the sounds of a woman's voice, or the wail of an infant. Beside one ancient was a plump, naked fragment of male humanity who dug his fat thumb into a lump of clay. I made clicking noises with my tongue, and he looked up at me for a moment as if I were a frightful apparition, which indeed I suppose I was, and then clambering to his feet he staggered into the dark interior from whence came the sound of scared lamentation. The potter looked up at me and smiled faintly as he adjusted his spectacles.

Not far from one of the gates of the city I came upon an unusually large communal well, built high above

the level of the street. It was approached by several flights of steps, and the square platform was covered by a graceful roof and rounded arches. Mounting the steps I found myself amid a crowd of young women among whom were a few men, and my sudden appearance caused an instant and mild sensation.

The stone balustrade of the actual well was draped with festoons of thin, wet rope, which lowered the many buckets over wooden wheels attached to stout supports. The well being a very deep one it took a considerable time to lower and raise again the buckets.

The young women, all unveiled, regarded me with coy interest, but they immediately turned away their heads when I looked at them directly. Many were quite comely, and all were adorned with complicated gold ear-rings, nose roses, and silver charms upon their foreheads. On their slender arms were dozens of coloured glass bangles, whilst over their heads were draped brightly coloured thin shawls, which fell gracefully to the waist, or were flung around the neck and over one shoulder. They wore the bright, many-folded petticoats, beneath which showed their bare legs and feet, upon which were heavy silver anklets.

Down in the cool green depths of the well the buckets rose and fell to the sounds of chattering and laughter. Water was spilled, gossip exchanged, and I suspected that my appearance, possible character, and likely morals were frankly discussed. But as I stood, an interested spectator, the men watched me with unsmiling faces, and eyes which clearly showed their suspicion of my interest in their womenfolk,

It is strange that the Indian still regards us as being highly dangerous where his women are concerned, because for very many years it has been extremely rare for a Briton to become entangled with an Indian woman who does not belong to the profession. I have never heard of an actual case, and yet, as I say, the middle and lower classes resent more than a passing glance at a young woman. It is, of course, banal to say that the



Oriental has always shown that he is fully aware that his fellow-man is fiercely polygamous, but he guards his women so carefully that such exaggerated suspicion seems to be quite unnecessary and childish to our Western minds.

It is a matter for more than passing astonishment that the British soldier, suffering as he does in India from an almost complete lack of feminine society, should so rarely become involved in affairs with Indians over women. This is all the more amazing when it is realized that he comes into far closer contact with the Indian than does his officer or the average civilian. All of which brings me to the astounding

fact that not so very long ago a certain military station in India tried an experiment, with disastrous results, on the question of supplying an organized outlet for the natural functions of soldiers. The subject, however, is regarded as indelicate and forbidden (why, goodness knows, it being one of our most serious social problems), and so I must write warily.

It was considered that soldiers, by visiting the various Indian houses in the bazaar, laid themselves dangerously open to contracting disease. A number of suitable women were procured, well paid and cared for, and as carefully guarded as they would have been in prison, whilst every known precaution was taken from a medical point of view. This experiment appeared to be a thoroughly sensible and enlightened one and the attendance figures made many sceptics open their eyes with amazement. In a short while, however, the curve on the disease charts rose sharply and in spite of careful investigation the reason was never discovered. The general problem of this subject in India still remains as acute as it ever was, but the time approaches when we shall be able to face it with clear, open sense, unhindered by narrow bigotry, most of which is fostered by spinsters who have been foiled of their natural functions. I have said quite enough and we had better return to where we should be, in Jodhpur city.

The modern portion of the city which lies outside the main gates (there are now no walls remaining) is splendidly laid out. The various government buildings and institutions stand in charming grounds and surroundings; wide, well-kept roads radiate in all directions; there are numerous sports grounds and

clubs, and also the fine hospital, which must be the most up to date in all the Indian states.

Completely hidden by large trees and gardens is His Highness' palace, a very unpretentious building, and one suited to his retiring character, but high up, and overlooking the city on a long ridge, is the new palace, built, so it is said, much against His Highness' wishes. It was started many years ago by an uncle who was then acting as regent, but the building has progressed very slowly because the present ruler will not permit more than a small portion of the revenue to be spent upon it each year. I paid a visit to this palace, which is nearing completion, and I was by no means impressed by it, the general layout being not unlike a huge railway station built on Eastern lines. I sympathize with His Highness in his dislike of the place, but once again you come up against the fact of pomp and circumstance which even the most enlightened of Indian rulers cannot afford to dismiss lightly.

Not far from the entrance gates of the occupied palace sits an ancient mendicant, who has taken up his pitch under some trees at a road junction. Surrounded by cooking-pots and drinking-vessels, bed-coverings, and an assortment of odds and ends, he has lived here for a considerable time. Harmlessly mad, he made a vow to remain on this spot until such time as the Maharajah should give him a motor car. What he proposed to do with the gift, if ever it was given to him, I did not learn, but every time I passed by he was busily entertaining a few friends.

One evening I was driven out to visit the ancient capital of Mandore, which lies several miles to the north of the present capital. The city is now a com-



plete ruin, but it is very, very old, and a few pathetic remains stand witness to what was a flourishing city in the year 1390. The grounds near by are bewitching, having an old-world charm not often met with in Oriental gardens. The well-kept paths meander between stretches of fine turf, under glorious trees of all sizes and shapes, beside variegated flower-beds, and past tiered lily ponds crossed by small bridges. In unexpected corners there are fragments of high walls, and one or two still perfect gateways whose stone glows a rich red, mellowed in places to pale rose and russet.

This garden would be cool and peaceful on the hottest Indian summer day, and as I wandered about on those paths the ghosts of long dead ladies of the Court kept me company. I could hear the rustle of their gorgeous silks, and the soft chirruping of their eager conversation. What did they talk about, these caged birds of paradise? Their Lord was away fighting in the South. When would he return to lighten their days once again. Was it true that Mehaji had slain twelve men single-handed and had been honoured by their Lord on the field of battle? Had it been noticed that our Lord's fourth son was looking with eager eyes upon the lovely Chamundi who had but recently come from Bikaner? Was she not a minx deserving of a severe whipping? What would our Lord say about it when he was told, as he surely would be? Someone would suffer, for was not the Lord's last-born ill with fearful belly pains through a surfeit of melons? Was not the Persian prince recently arrived from Delhi a god-like, strong-loined man? Were all Persians such as he? What presents would our Lord bring back to delight the treasures of his heart?

And so the chattering and eternal questions and answers floated about my ears like the sound of far distant music. I sighed. These dainty little ladies had flowered, faded, and passed on, as quickly as the night-scented lilies, and only the perfume of their presence still lingered in that lovely garden to colour my day-dreams.

Beyond the lily ponds was a space set apart for the cenotaphs of past rulers. Varied in shape and size they are all elaborately carved, but are only of passing interest to those who have seen many other such things before. The Hawa Mahal, however, is a gem of restrained and lovely design. Rising like a splendid but delicate flower to a height of three stories, it is octagonal, and the tiny balconies and the latticework of the windows are as fine as lacework and as delightful as those who once used it.

To one side of the grounds is the curious Hall of Heroes, where on the face of a high outcrop of rock have been carved sixteen figures depicting various gods and warriors with whom the ruling house claim connection. These figures are life-sized, and are startling and most interesting, all of them being highly coloured. They ride upon elephants or horses, squat in fantastic poses as they wave swords, and grimace or glare in a terrifying manner. Among them is Pabuji, a Rathor hero whose memory is cherished for his care and preservation of cows ; he was in fact killed for their sake when fighting with Jind Rao : Gogaji was a very charitable person and a great warrior : Surajji is the Sun, and Chamundaji the goddess of the ruling house.

On the return journey from Mandore we visited the Balsamund Bund which is at the far end of yet one more

lovely garden, but which was less formal than the one we had left. I was told that the temperature is always five to ten degrees cooler in these gardens than that of the surrounding country.

The Bund was built nearly eight hundred years ago, and forms a lake and an emergency reservoir in times of drought. It is approached by several flights of steps leading on to a wide, marble-faced terrace, which drops to the water's edge many feet below. A delicate balustrade runs the whole length, and in it are built out tiny pavilions from which it is possible to angle for the shadowy and huge fish which glide in the clear water. Leaning on the balustrade I looked across the placid water to where the low hills were the deepest purple. The glory of the setting sun stippled the water from blazing crimson, the clearest primrose, and apricot, to flaming russets, nigger brown, and pavonine. How calm and lovely it was; and once again past events surged out of their dim caverns like bats at sunset time. Here was the full Court out from the close heat of the city at the end of a summer's day. Soldiers, courtiers, politicians, and the ruler's relatives stroll up and down, some feeding the fish, others laughing and jesting, and all prepared to listen to the latest scandal or gossip. There are gorgeous turbans and head-dresses; a flashing from the gold hilts of swords and daggers, the glinting of jewels, and the silks whose colours vie with the sunset. The womenfolk, screened by marble or wood latticework, are in the large pavilion at the rear, from which they peep out to watch their Lord who is fishing. They laugh and clap their hands each time he hauls up a glistening and violently agitated fish. Close to the

Maharajah is a huge, black-bearded man, dressed in silver and rose brocade, with flashing gems in his turban. He is a visiting prince from Persia, and he treats the courtiers with lofty disdain.

The sun is now gone ; the picture fades, and, returning to reality, I shivered ; it was time to go home. We of the West are often inclined to look upon an Eastern court as living in the manner of a scene shown on a hot, stuffy London stage, where it is surrounded by decadent luxury and fierce intrigue. In actual fact these people have always appreciated natural beauty and fresh air as much as we do to-day. Their houses, before we came to taint them with the horrors of the Victorian age, were far more lovely and artistic than are our own ; they understood the value of space, not only inside, but outside as well.

In the late afternoon on the day before my departure for Jaipur I went across to the aerodrome, with its splendid layout and setting. A huge K.L.M. liner circled above my head, coming at last to earth with a mighty roaring of engines. The passengers alighted, and in a few moments Indian workmen and engineers were swarming over the machine as they oiled, refuelled, and examined it. The smart and up-to-date offices sprang to life, and I was able to watch the extremely efficient manner in which this aerodrome is run. Here, at least, was nothing of the supposed Oriental lassitude and disregard of time.

As a startling contrast I wandered across an adjoining field and came upon a country road where cattle were being driven homewards. Clad only in loin-cloths, small boys, behind the slowly meandering beasts, with their huge horns and eyes, shuffled along, deliberately

raising clouds of pale yellow dust with their bare feet. These boys called to each other, and whacked the laggards with long sticks. In the air was the acrid smell of cow-dung smoke from the near-by village, where the evening meals were being prepared ; the low sun turned the ever-rising dust to a golden haze, and overhead small flights of screaming green parrots shot across the sunset to their resting-places. Before my eyes was being enacted a scene older than history and behind my head was modernity in its most blatant form.

In bed that night I lay and considered the possible fate of this happy, pleasant state. The canker in the form of Congress, general agitation, self-seekers, and the servants who would be rulers, all are striking at the heart of India. How long would Jodhpur be able to fight effectively against the deadly disease, the germs of which are already found in its cities ?

## CHAPTER II

**F**EW visitors to India can fail to have been impressed by the highly coloured posters which laud and advertise the charms of Jaipur, but like many other forms of advertisement which are blatant, the wares fall far short of what is claimed for them.

I went to the state fully prepared to enjoy my visit, and I came away not only disappointed, but shocked. The truth is that Jaipur is shoddy, neglected, and entirely unimpressive. These are strong words, and I must remind my readers that they are only my own personal views and must be taken as such. I am ready to believe that quite a lot of people have been, and will be, entranced by a visit to this state.

My arrival resembled that at Jodhpur, but my heart sank as I was driven along a main road in cantonments whose sides were untidy and neglected, and it sank still further when I reached the chosen hotel, where I hoped for something like that at Jodhpur. A vain hope, because although my bedroom was pleasant enough the single and tiny public room, apart from the dining-room, closely resembled that of a third-class dentist's waiting-room, even to the aged travel publications and periodicals. The grounds were fairly well kept, but on leaving the hotel I found that a deliberate attempt had been made to overcharge me, a matter which I pointed out with some heat.

After breakfast I inquired the price of a motor car

which would take me slowly about the city so that I could gain a general impression of the place. I find that on first arrival in a new locality this is often a most satisfactory proceeding, because you can then make mental notes of places of interest which can be visited later at leisure. The price asked for the motor car was, however, so high that I set out on foot to visit the city, which is walled.

That walk will remain long in my memory. Turning right outside the hotel grounds, I proceeded down a long straight road which had dusty, uneven sidewalks, and I could see the castellated walls of the city on the left. I walked for at least two miles, but without finding a gate of any kind which led into the city. I came at last to two long lines of shops, many of which sold cheap and hideous curios and much crude, local brass work ; and over them brooded an air of shoddy, dusty incompetence, whilst the shopkeepers were only moderately civil, and asked absurdly high prices for their wares, a state of affairs caused by sudden influxes of wealthy tourists lured there by the aforementioned posters and smooth-tongued travel agencies. Leaving the shops I came upon a bridge spanning a large but dry watercourse which meandered across a wide open space not unlike a builder's dump. On the far side of this space were the walls of the city, and in them I spied a small gate ; but there was no road or path leading to it. Clambering down beside the bridge I made my way up the watercourse over the loose sand to the gate and so entered Jaipur city.

Thirty yards inside I halted more astonished than I had been for a long time—it was as if I had stepped through a doorway into what I had hoped was a fine

garden only to see a sand pit. This was surely not India ; not the capital of a wealthy Indian state. It was a West African village with all its squalor, mud walls, roughly thatched hovels, narrow, uneven lanes, strewn with mangy dogs, filthy children, and monkeys who leapt from wall to roof. Deeply interested I proceeded slowly, followed by chattering insults from the monkeys, and dark, glum looks from the men. Reminding myself that on no account must I allow myself to become prejudiced by unfortunate first impressions, I went ahead, but as I progressed I became more and more amazed. The crude, dilapidated mud walls partly screened tiny courtyards, in which were garbage, dust, a few bedraggled plants, aged bedsteads, odd junk, mildew, and broken pottery. There was an air of helpless poverty and hopeless despair overhanging this area, which was utterly depressing. I knew quite well that Indian cities have squalor in the same way as European towns, but this was beyond anything I had seen.

Gradually, however, I came upon better conditions, and finally met one of the main roads on which were hurrying crowds, motor cars, and even traffic policemen. Turning left I went out of the city by means of a double gateway and so emerged on to what was a fine boulevard. I then went back to the hotel for luncheon and after tea set out once again to visit the city. This time I frequented the more prosperous portions, but here again I was not impressed. The shops were dusty, shoddy, and entirely without interest, and those who thronged the streets were neither prosperous nor contented, judging by their glum, unsmiling faces.



The streets were wide, but on them there was not a shred of Eastern romance, or anything worth more than a passing glance. Not a single building is worthy of comment, and even the old palace had few of the attractions of such places—in fact from the outside it resembled a police-force headquarters. Inside were the usual courtyards, diwans, women's quarters, and gardens. In its hey-day it might have been a charming spot, but now it has much of the neglected air of the city outside its walls.

From what has been said I feel my readers will consider that this author had a bad cold in the head or a bout of depression when he visited Jaipur, and so has taken a jaundiced view. This is not the case—I arrived in the state fully prepared to enjoy what it had to offer.

The following morning I hired a car and went on a visit to the palace at Amber, which lies about six miles to the north. This would surely make some attempt to come up to expectations, because it was lauded as a sight on no account to be missed.

The touring car left the city by yet another double gateway and came out on to a road which ran for several miles through a curious piece of country. For a considerable depth on either side it was lined with thick, but low jungle, out of which a dead city reared its mouldering bones. Partly ruined temples, large houses, small shrines, and undefinable walls gave the area an atmosphere of desolation which was most depressing. Between the ruins peasants strove to cultivate small plots of land, and where once well-to-do people lived, monkeys rioted and plantains grew beside the doorways.

The road gradually sloped upwards and entered a

narrow, gorge-like strip of country where trees grew thinly on the brown hill-sides which, so the driver of the car told me, contained many tigers. The palace, like so many of these places, was really a glorified fort and is situated on the lower slopes of a hill and looks down on to a small valley in the hills. It is a vast building, and its towering, cupola-studded walls are magnificent in their barren strength, and seen from a distance the spectacle is a fine one.

We drew up in a car park and I got out and found myself in a series of charming and well-kept gardens. There were lily ponds, paved walks, and cool pavilions, all of which were a part of a dam, natural or otherwise ; the major portion of the valley below the palace was a lake, which was at that time quite dry. The climb to the main gateway was a long and arduous one over an ill-paved road and I was hot and out of breath before I reached it.

The interior of the palace is in a far better state of repair than I had expected it would be, many fresh decorations having been recently carried out. There is much of interest, although the various Royal apartments, reception-rooms, courtyards, and gardens, are similar in design to those elsewhere in India. There is, however, a really beautiful and quite magnificent gateway leading into the harem whose profuse decorations look as fresh as if they were new.

When roaming about in a place of this kind I am far more interested in where odd doorways and dark passages lead, and in out-of-the-way corners. It was this inquisitiveness that guided me to an insignificant doorway beneath the harem. It led to a narrow and sloping passage-way, down several flights of curved

steps, and so to three or four chambers, which at first sight might have been tombs. A closer inspection revealed them as bathrooms, undoubtedly used by ladies of the harem. I was amused by the highly elaborate precautions which had been taken to ensure that these unclad ladies should not be spied upon; such light as did penetrate the gloom came from tiny windows each fitted with deeply coloured red or blue glass. The actual baths were merely square holes in the stone floor, lined with ledges as seats, around which were a few tiny alcoves for lights, and each was blackened by ancient flame.

From the upper rooms of the Royal quarters, which lined the top of the walls, there was a grand view across the valley to the distant hills. When the lake was filled and water-lilies floated upon it; when the gardens were ablaze with flowers, and a soft evening breeze was coming up the valley, it must have been enchanting to sit on one of the tiny balconies and dream, shut off from the world.

Behind the palace and high up on yet another hill-side was the real fort, and a grim impregnable place it looked, but it was too far off for me to visit. Many of the old Indian builders had almost as strong a passion for wall building as have the Chinese. Here at Amber there must have been many miles of wall, not only round the palace, but joining it to the distant fort and rampaging among the trees on the hill-tops opposite. These walls were not ordinary ones, but thick and high, and easily defended, which must have taken a vast expenditure of labour to throw up.

One unusual feature at Amber was the attitude of the custodians. They eyed me with hostile suspicion,

and whenever I attempted to penetrate into some forbidden corner one would pounce out and aggressively order me to retire. There were no smiles, or offers to act as guides, and I was left with the impression that I was most certainly not wanted there, and the sooner I went away the better they would be pleased.

On the return journey to Jaipur I stopped the car and got out to explore a series of buildings by the roadside which formed a part of the dead city of which I have already spoken. I clambered over decayed walls, pushed my way between thick shrubs into deserted gardens, and so came upon a temple which was still in use. Not without much searching I found a flight of steps and went up to the ruined platform from where I could look down on the surrounding land. In every direction was crumpled, chaotic wilderness, defaced buildings, blasted walls, and crushed masonry. Indian architecture in decay has no dignity, no grandeur, the elements exposing the fact that beneath the marble, the stone, or the plaster facing, there is only a mass of loosely put together rubble, and solidity is a sham. In spite of this there is a kind of perverse fascination in such places ; they are so hopeless and resemble a lovely woman wasted by illness. Around that temple, with its pathetic attempts at repairs, was utter stillness, not a bird sang or a monkey chattered : above was the hot, sun-bleached sky.

Leaning against a crumbling pillar I smoked a cigarette, and as I did so a sadness crept over me and I shivered slightly. Then there came an agitated rustling from some bushes at the foot of the steps, and out of the greenery came a goat's head. Its silly face waggled to and fro, it snatched a mouthful of leaves

and saw me. The head was hurriedly withdrawn. At this point I became aware that two men were hastening towards me as fast as the barriers in their paths would permit. They came up the steps and I saw that one was an old man, and the other young and scowling.

"Go away," said the ancient abruptly.

"Why should I go away, O Father of Misfortune?" I asked.

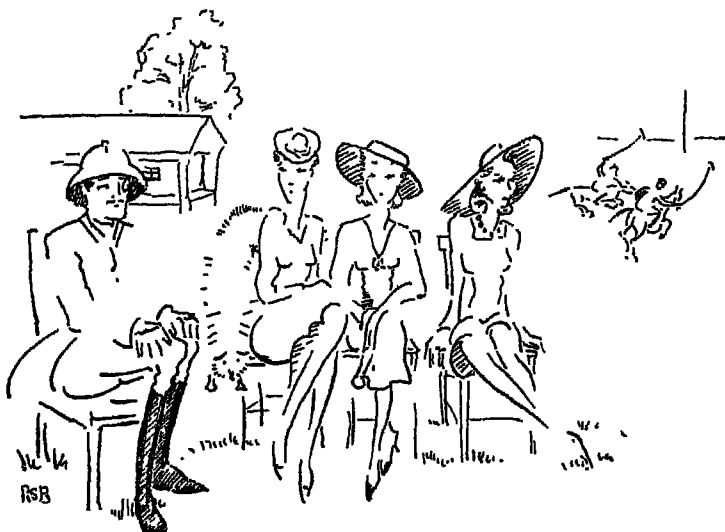
"The ground is sacred. Go at once. Thou hast no right to be here," he replied, and the younger man scowled more deeply.

"Thy manners are those of the goat, O All But Dead One," I answered, moving towards the steps. "But I will go because thy presence darkens the sun and the countenance of thy companion is that of a hairless monkey."

The younger man started angrily towards me, but the elder held him back and I departed with leisurely dignity. I told the driver of my car of this experience and he grinned, saying that all the people of the district were as amiable as monkeys because they had never enough to eat.

I used another letter of introduction, and it was to a woman doctor whose husband kindly invited me to visit the club as his guest. In the early evening on the eve of my departure from the state I walked down to the club, and on the way came upon the polo grounds which are a part of the club. Two teams were practising, and one of them included His Highness, the Maharajah. I sat down on one of a row of chairs to watch. On my left, and near by, were several young English women of a type which reminded me of the

less attractive portions of suburbia. They were guests of His Highness out from home, and staying at the new palace. I eyed them furtively and with interest and speculation, and their glances in return were those of a haughty young florist's assistant.



His Highness is quite a young man, and is said to own many horses, ponies, and expensive cars, and to spend much of his time amusing himself.

When the polo was over I went across to the club house and found my host seated in a small, but very modern cocktail bar. I was immediately introduced to a number of people, both British and Indian, a small party was made up, and we went out to sit beside a table on the wide veranda. Within a few moments I found that the Jaipur Club was the meeting-place of the strangest and most violent contrasts between the new and the old that I have met anywhere in the world.

The members are made up of the Indian nobility, higher Government officials, and British residents of standing. The younger Indian men, with their aristocratic features and clear skins, were clad in well-cut and highly-expensive English clothes, whether tweeds or flannels. The middle-aged and older men were all dressed, more or less, in Indian Court dress, that is the long, beautiful, silken brocade coats, splendid pugarees, and the tight Jodhpur-type of leg wear.

It was not long before I became fascinated by a terrible contrast; that between an elderly Indian nobleman and a young married English woman. The old gentleman, who was His Highness' father, was dignified and dressed in wondrous, old-world clothes, whilst she was awful and blatant modernity. He wore a splendid brocaded coat, a golden sword, and belt, and gold anklets, and held dignified conversation with others only less fine than himself. The woman so close to him was rouged and had suspiciously fair hair and was clad in a tight-fitting, sleeveless jumper and a pair of white shorts, which had they been two inches shorter would not have been shorts at all, but a pair of bathing-slips. She sat with crossed, stockingless, shaved legs, and smoked a cigarette from a long holder. Why she was ever allowed to enter the club mystified me; but there she was, and there she sat, and no one seemed to be particularly outraged by her presence.

His Highness at this time was playing bridge in the card-room with three highly respectable English people. Many members offered me drinks and talked to me, but few, if any, of the Indians passed even the most slightly controversial remark without carefully

glancing around to see who might be within earshot. This was illuminating and showed that Court intrigue was as strong and ruthless as ever it was.

When my bearer brought in my early morning tea on the following day I said to him :

“ Well, Mullu, we depart from here to-day. What do you think of Jaipur ? ”

The bearer, although not much more than a boy, sniffed—he sniffed just as a disdainful dowager will do.

“ A bad place, sahib. The water, food, and air are all bad. The people are buffaloes. Where do we now go, sahib ? ”

“ We are going down to Bundi. [Pronounced ‘ Boondi. ’] Do you know where that is ? ”

“ No, sahib, but in your shadow I shall doubtless soon know.”

“ It is a small Indian state in Central India,” I replied, and, arising, went to my bath.

It was not without much unpleasantness that I left this hotel, because the manager attempted grossly to overcharge me. With still bristling hackles we arrived at the station and I prepared to leave Jaipur without regret. A further unpleasantness was, however, to be encountered. Walking up the platform to my train I came upon the body of a person who had just died in one of the carriages, and then, incredible as it may seem, not five yards from my own compartment yet another Indian, a woman, was in the act of expiring on the platform. I hurried by with a shudder because she was not dying gracefully. And in such a manner did I leave Jaipur.



### CHAPTER III

**B**UNDI is a small and entirely Indian state which is tucked away in southern Rajputana, and, as the reader will learn, is very much off the beaten track and unspoiled by the taint of Western civilization. There are no railways ; the only motor cars are those owned by the Maharajah, his staff, and the Resident ; there is only one main road, the northern end of which begins at Ajmer and the southern at Kotah. Because the journey by road from Ajmer to the capital of Bundi was much farther than from Kotah I chose the latter by way of which to enter the state.

There are no hotels and so I had written to the British Resident in the capital asking if he would be kind enough to arrange some kind of accommodation for me during my three or four days' stay. He failed to reply, and thinking that his letter might have gone astray I wired to him to answer at Kotri Junction, which is the nearest railway station to Kotah. Should his reply be unfavourable I was prepared to stay at Kotah, which is the capital of another Indian state, but one which is much more advanced than that of Bundi.

The train journey from Jaipur to Kotri is not of any great length, but it turned out to be very tiresome and took from the early morning until the late evening to perform. The country-side is of monotonous sameness, being dry, dusty, flat, and only partly

cultivated. Now and again small ridges of hills rose up and on most of them there was at least one fort. It has always been something of a mystery to me how large armies managed to feed themselves in such country, which did not look as if it were capable of producing more than enough to feed the cultivator's family. And yet huge armies in the past moved and fought over this country several times in a century, and they undoubtedly lived on what they could find at hand.

At a station some distance south of Jaipur there was a commotion outside my compartment, the door opened, and a disreputable man appeared. I was just about to tell him to go away when I saw that he was the servant of the person at his heels. A bright yellow tin box and a large, soft bundle were pushed inside and the owner followed them. He was an unusual figure and one not often seen in India to-day. Thin, tall, hawk-nosed, and bearded, he was middle-aged and wore a sword and belt, both of which were heavily covered with golden thread; his pugaree was beautiful to behold. He was obviously a personage, and probably a well-to-do landowner of good family who had been on a state visit of some kind.

After lengthy instructions to his servant, given in a dialect I did not know, he sat down opposite to me and cleared his throat nervously; he eyed me with apprehension and it was clear that he was not used to the company of sahibs. I smiled encouragingly at him, but he turned his head abruptly away, causing my little speech to dry up on my tongue. For twenty minutes we were acutely aware of each other's presence, until at last he could stand it no longer, and, rising

up, he left the compartment at another station to find, I hope, more congenial company.

I should have liked to have known who he was, because he was of that splendid type of old-fashioned Indian (what we should call Landed Gentry) who is being crushed out of existence by our policy and the ill-bred, fortune-hunting babu from the cities.

At 2 p.m. we arrived at the junction where a change of trains had to be made and I learned that I should have to wait an hour and a half for the mail train with its restaurant-car. I had had no lunch and the station was hot, empty, and tiresome : but I was able to buy two bottles of beer. A young American now appeared on the scene, and we foregathered, he having come down on the same train as myself, but in a lower class. Sitting on one of the only two seats I offered him some of the beer, which he politely refused. I learned that he had come from Japan by way of China, the Malay States, and Southern India, and was now on his way to Bombay because ' he just had to be ' in New York in time for Thanksgiving Day.

He was in the early twenties, good looking, cheerful, and, on the surface, quite the most sophisticated young man I have ever met. I was given to understand that he had seen everything, been everywhere, and done everything worth doing, and that life to him was now an empty oyster-shell.

Sitting on that hot, hard seat I goggled at him.

" You don't really expect me to believe all that, do you ? " I protested, astonished into rudeness.

" Yes, sure I do," he replied seriously. " Life's a Gor darn puzzle to me. I can't make up my mind whether to go into business or back again to college."

“But what does your father have to say to all this?”

The boy grinned, and Father was swiftly dismissed by vocal and facial expressions which dubbed him as a person of no consequence and of mean understanding. All the way down to Kotri Junction, in the restaurant-car, I pointed out the error of his assumptions, and he accepted my scandalized comments with high good humour. We then parted, but I get a letter from him occasionally and understand that he has gone into business after all: I should not be surprised if Father had a hand in this.

Close to the railway station at Kotri was the Dak bungalow in which I was to spend the night. Dak bungalows are rest-houses provided by the Government for the use of travellers of all creeds and types. This bungalow was a large one, and in residence were several minor Indian officials who, like all their class, talked loudly and importantly at all hours—much was aimless gabbling.

I was given a room in which I was to sleep and take my meals, and then interviewed the Indian butler in charge, who was a plump and only just civil person. There was no wire, or letter, awaiting me from the Resident at Bundi; the city of Kotah was four miles distant; there were no hotels in Kotah fit for Europeans, and no cars for hire to take me there; in fact, sightseers like myself were almost unheard of, most Britons arriving in their own cars.

To be alone in a carless Central India, devoid of telegrams, and at the mercy of Indian butlers, was depressing, and so I went across and sought out an

Indian railway official who was most polite, friendly, and helpful.

The place in which the letter, or telegram, might be awaiting me was unfortunately closed, but he would send instantly for the clerk. How was I to get to Bundi if there were no cars? Well, why did the sahib not use the mail bus which left the station at 8 a.m. each morning for Bundi? He, the official, would tell the driver to call for me at the dak bungalow. Was it a good bus? Oh, yes, it was a bus of much comeliness and comfort. The sahib should have the front seat and all the, doubtless, heavy baggage should go on to the roof. What was the cost? But a few rupees, and the journey only three hours. Yes, if the telegram had arrived it should be sent across at once.

After a meal in my room, consisting of strange soup, mangled fowl, and a tiny, lone sardine on a piece of soggy toast, the expected telegram was brought across from the station with many apologies for the delay. The clerk in question had been at his ablutions and these, of course, as the Heaven-born would realize, could not be hurried, or cut short.

I tore open the telegram and read it. It was short and to the point.

‘Accommodation has been arranged for you in the State Guest House.’

This was a pleasant surprise because it meant that I should be the Maharajah’s guest. Now all was well, because, as was natural, the possibility of my being thwarted had increased my desire to visit this state.

Before going to bed I was lured out for a short walk by the fact that, close to the bungalow, was a

Hindu temple in which a festival was in progress, and the drums had been going continuously since my arrival. I peered in through the gateway, where, among the twinkling lights, vague shadows moved to and fro across the front of the shrine. The air was heavy with a mixture of rather unpleasant smells, cymbals clashed now and again, and the voices of the priests became mixed with the maddening tautophony of the drums.

It was a lovely night, so clear, and still, and starlit, and in the small bazaar the workers were squatting at the evening meal where they gossiped, whilst a soft-voiced singer proclaimed that his love had lips like the heart of a rose and her gait was that of the partridge.

The following morning all was ready for the mail bus, and just before eight o'clock it arrived with a flourish and I smiled when I remembered the official's remarks concerning its comeliness. Like all its kind in India it looked as if it might fall to pieces at any moment ; it lacked paint, and was scarred with many ancient blows, but above the windscreen was a beautiful coat of arms and the words ' Royal Mail ' in large letters. Behind the front seat was a compact mass of chattering Indians, all of whom regarded me with amiable interest.

The driver and Mullu Ram stored away the luggage, I took my seat beside the driver, the gears were crashed into place, and the vehicle started forward with a violent jerk. On the road to Kotah repairs were taking place, and a wide detour had to be made through dust a foot thick and around corners which had to be manipulated by sickening wrenches of the steering-

wheel. I have not yet come to severe disaster in a native-driven vehicle and I think their gods must have a hand in this, because, be it Japanese, Cambodian, Indian, or Samoan, they are all the same, and take risks which make you shudder even to contemplate.

Once again upon the proper road we hurtled into the city, to pick up fresh passengers and mails before setting out on the Bundi road. I will, however, speak of the city later when I came to visit it again on my return from Bundi. After a wait of twenty minutes before a goldsmith's shop, where I was the target for much speculation from passers-by, we resumed the journey.



We tore down the main street with yelling horn, through a narrow gateway, missing wandering cows, bicyclists, and horse vehicles by fractions of an inch, and a dreadful lurch to the left took us down a steep hill and on to a long bridge which crossed the partly dry bed of the River Chumbul. On the far side of

the bridge the road sloped steeply upwards and near the top was a sharp corner, and it was here that we nearly met gory disaster. Without warning, around the corner, just as we reached it, came a large flock of sheep and goats. We pulled up with a jerk that would have made me swallow my false teeth, had I any, and looking out I saw that the front wheels were actually touching the muzzles of the leading beasts. Of course, the brakes failed to act and we began to slip backwards. I started to leave the bus, having no desire to be flung backwards into the river, and the excitement of those less well placed for saving themselves became hysterical. The brakes, however, began to bind at last, and after a few pointed remarks between the drover and the driver we went on.

The road which ran almost straight for its thirty-odd miles was quite good, and passed flat, rather uninteresting country, being mainly empty fields with scattered groves of trees. Halts were made at various police posts, and so without further incident we drew near to our destination. I inquired of the driver as to where the Resident lived, and he explained that we should pass quite close to the house, and added that he would wait for me whilst I went to see him.

On the outskirts of the city we drew up at the roadside, and a large white house standing in spacious and pleasant grounds was pointed out as the Resident's. I walked up the drive to where, on the veranda, an animated scene was taking place. The Resident and his wife were surrounded by boxes and cases, and a number of well-dressed Indians stood about on the drive. I introduced myself and received a cool welcome. The Resident stated bluntly that he was



very busy, being just about to start on a shooting trip which was to last several days. He formally regretted his departure, but turning to a slim Indian explained that this was the Maharajah's private secretary who would look after me. He turned away and the interview was at an end. I went back to the bus experiencing that unpleasant sensation of not being wanted. But I closed my lips and stuck out my chin. There I was and there I was going to stay. If I was being a nuisance, then why had the Resident not said there was no accommodation available ?

At the guest-house my bearer and luggage were off loaded and the bus departed upon its legitimate business. The guest-house was very old and not uncomfortable, but the one reception-room made me shudder, it being filled with ghastly relics of the Victorian era—in 1860 an enchanting room, but now a nightmare. The Indian butler was polite and produced an excellent luncheon, but his manner implied that, although I was a major sahib, I was undoubtedly a little mad.

Before giving my impressions of this state a little of its history must be given. The state was named after a Mina chieftain called Bunda, and was founded at some time during 1100. Its inhabitants are, of course, Hindus, and the present Maharajah is retiring and old-fashioned, speaking no English and receiving only the most distinguished of foreign visitors.

The capital, which is small and walled, is situated in a gorge and almost surrounded by wooded hills upon which are the usual forts.

According to a quaint little guide-book produced for me from the palace, it would seem that the Bundi

chieftains were great fighters, tearing up and down India aiding this or that Mogul emperor. This book gives a queer story which I will quote in its own words.

‘ Rao Raja Bhoji reigned in Bundi from 1585 until 1607. He fought in Gujrat for the Emperor Akbar, and killed the king of Surat. He killed the notorious rebel, Sikh Hira Singh, who was a terror in the Punjab.

‘ In recognition of his gallant and loyal services the emperor gave him (among other things) his own favourite elephant. Notwithstanding all these services Rao Bhoj fell under the emperor’s displeasure. On the death of the queen, Jodha Bai, Akbar commanded a Court mourning; and that all might testify a participation in their master’s affliction, an ordinance was issued that all Rajput chiefs, as well as the Moslem leaders, should shave their moustaches and beards. To secure compliance royal barbers had the execution of the mandate. But when they came to the quarters of the Haras (presumably those of Bundi) in order to remove these tokens of manhood, they were repulsed with buffets and contumely. The enemies of Rao Bhoj aggravated the crime of the resistance and insinuated to the royal ear that the outrage upon the barbers was accompanied with expressions insulting to the memory of departed princes. Akbar, forgetting his vassal’s gallant services, commanded that the Rao should be pinioned and forcibly deprived of his *mouche*. He might as well have commanded the operation on a tiger. The Haras flew to arms: the camp was thrown into tumult and would soon have presented a wide scene of bloodshed, had not

the emperor, seasonably repenting of his folly, repaired to the Bundi quarters in person. He expressed his admiration (he might have said his fear) of Hara valour, alighted from his elephant to expostulate with the Rao, who with considerable tact pleaded his father's privileges and added "that an eater of pork like him was unworthy of the distinction of putting his lips into mourning of the queen." Akbar, happy to obtain even so much acknowledgment, embraced the Rao and carried him to his own quarters.'

After tea, no word having come from the private secretary, I set out to explore the city. The road leading to it was a part of the tiny cantonment and of little interest, but a mile farther on were the walls, which are those of a thoroughly well-preserved medieval city, not very high, but thick and surrounded by the remains of a moat. The top was ornamented by an unusual form of decoration where large stones, closely resembling tombstones, were placed side by side and facing outwards.

Before the walls leading to the main gateway was a large open space used as a market, and it was at this time a very animated and colourful scene. Sellers of grain, vegetables, pottery, and trinkets squatted before their wares, and most of the colours in the rainbow were represented in the clothes of those who slowly meandered up and down, glowing in the golden light of the setting sun like variegated flowers. A low, soft chattering rose up on the still air, which was warm and had floating on it most of the exciting Eastern smells.

My presence was, of course, an instant attraction to the young who, calling to each other, came as close as they dared and stared at me with the usual round-eyed, unblinking stares. One butter-coloured fragment about a foot high, clad in a ridiculous shirt which only half covered his gourd-like tummy, startled and amused me. He turned to his elder brother, whose hand he was holding, and then pointing a fat finger at me said loudly and firmly, "Shaitan," which being translated means 'devil.'

Two of the state elephants came out of the city and ambled down the road towards me with their huge ears flapping and their mahouts astride their necks. Each was brilliantly painted with yellow, red, and blue pigment, and the leading beast was quite the largest I have ever seen.

The road at the far end of the open space turned sharply to the right before the entrance to the city, and ran between two vast, square, and very deep water-tanks, which are a feature of this part of the country and about which I will speak more later on. Standing on the edge of one of these tanks was a sublime Greek god ; a youth drawing water by means of a long cord and leather bucket. The soft yellow light shone on his smooth, unclad, slim body, and showed up every rippling muscle under his satin-like skin, as he stooped, hauled, and straightened himself. He was, in fact, a glorious, animated bronze statue. He turned and saw me and a sudden grin showed a flash of white teeth. He flung up a hand and pushed back his hair with enchanting, unstudied grace.

The actual gateway does not face the road leading to it, but stands to one side, and on the left, and in the

small open space before it are crowded many tiny shops and a single, very large pipal tree.

These tiny shops and booths were gay with brightly-coloured wares. There were bales of softly-tinted silks stacked high, rolls of vividly-dyed cotton cloth, and strange crimson garments fluttered from pegs. In some of the shops there were assortments of cheap-jack European goods, much of which consisted of celluloid dyed pink, or bright yellow, and children's toys appeared to be in great demand.

Entering the city by the massive double gateway, you step straight back through the centuries, where little has changed and modernity is almost unknown. The roadway was narrow and uneven, and, in fact, little more than an alley, but over it moved a continual stream of congested traffic. Women and children carrying bundles of all shapes and sizes disputed the right of way with laden asses and wandering cows. Men stood in groups and gossiped and were pushed aside by those on more urgent business. Every now and again the crowd became violently agitated when a horse vehicle ploughed its way through towards the gateway.

On either side of this roadway were the tiny open-fronted shops of the silversmiths. In each one were two men busily at work fashioning the more popular forms of jewellery. There were the long double and even treble chains of linked silver, heavy anklets, tiny nose roses, bangles, rings for the toes, and ornaments to be worn on the middle of the forehead. In one of these shops I bought a silver tray into which had been beaten a pleasing design, and the price was a tenth of what I should have had to pay in Europe.

What strikes you so forcibly when gazing at such craftsmen at work is the infinite patience which is called for and the extremely primitive appliances which are used. A tiny charcoal fire, a weird-looking drill worked by the toes, a few small hammers and chisels, and the bars of rough silver is all there is to be seen. Squatting cross-legged on their mats, these silversmiths tap, heat, and fashion the strips of silver all the hours of daylight. They rarely talk and hardly ever look up into the street.

Pushing onwards the road sloped downwards and opened out into a small space in the middle of which was standing a quaint policeman who appeared to spend most of his time conversing amiably with passers-by. Just before reaching this point an incident took place which made me laugh heartily. A few yards in front was a woman carrying a fat bundle of hay under one arm. Something soft and warm pushed hurriedly past me and I saw that it was a young and active cow. That cow ran down the road after the woman and, reaching her, it impudently snatched a mouthful of hay. The woman, surprised and angry, turned and gave the wet, black muzzle a hearty slap ; but the cow was not to be denied and she hunted the woman from my sight, snatching mouthfuls at every few paces.

To the left was the beginning of the main street which was fairly wide and paved with stone, but its surface caused me to pause in puzzled astonishment. For many yards it was liberally splashed with what seemed to be blood, which had run down into the gutters and gave the place an air of a slaughter-house. It took a few minutes before I found the reason for

this state of affairs. Raised well above the street level, and on both sides, were the shops of the cloth-dyers, who, at the end of each day's work, merely emptied the contents of their dye-pans on to the stones below.

I scrambled up and watched them at work and they eyed me at first with nervous apprehension, but when I talked and smiled at them they were as delighted as children. Laughing, they showed me their craft, and called excitedly to one another that I, a strange sahib, was being friendly. My heart warmed to them and I felt happier than I had done all that day.

Half-way up the street a gateway had been flung across it and on the left and just beyond it was the post office. Such a queer, ramshackle little place it was, where a tiny door led to a flight of insecure wooden stairs, which in turn opened out on to a trembling veranda, facing which were two rooms, each bare except for a single table and chair. At one of these tables I bought a few stamps, but it was some time before I found the letter-box, which turned out to be a rough slit in the wall on the street.

Squatting opposite to the post office, on a platform beside the gateway, were the young, bespectacled letter-writers who, for a small copper coin, would pen your correspondence. They were doing no business and were engaged in reading postcards, which they passed from hand to hand, giggling as they did so.

It was almost dark when I got back to the guest-house, but, with a whisky and soda, I went up on to the flat roof, with its extensive space of rambling levels. Here it was cool and pleasant, and the celestial star-lighter was dashing to and fro across the heavens.

The coolness of my reception that morning still lingered like a bitter taste on my tongue. Sitting down on the warm masonry I considered the reason for the silence from the palace, because I was now being pointedly ignored. The answer was not very long in arriving. Remembering that in India pomp and circumstance means everything, I had damned myself badly, if not utterly. Who but a low-caste sahib would arrive in the state on a mail bus, and such a bus? It was as if I had been invited to stay at the house of a prince of the blood and had arrived on the doorstep in a dust-cart with paper parcels instead of cases of fine leather. In no time at all, all who were interested in such matters in the city knew about me, including the private secretary.

I had, of course, no shadow of claim upon the good offices of the Maharajah, but the Resident had told the private secretary, in my hearing, to look after me. A personal call with offers of assistance to view the city and the palace was, in such a case, to be taken for granted. After due consideration I decided that I would remain for one more day and if I were still ignored I would go back to Kotah and write to the Resident.

After breakfast the next morning I walked round the walls of the city on the outside. Keeping to the right a road wandered beside a semi-dry watercourse, and through a thin wood where there were many aged and tumbled-down tombs. Monkeys played among them, and dogs barked furiously as I passed by. The soft red walls, two hundred yards away across the stream, kept me company until at last I came to a huge dam which had been flung across the water-



course. This could only mean one thing, a lake; and so it turned out to be.

The city walls now turned sharply away and a good broad road from a gateway in the walls led upwards to various buildings, temples, and the entrance to the gardens on the dam. These gardens were lovely, with their meandering walks, tall trees, and masses of flowering shrubs, all well cared for, but avoiding anything in the nature of formality. The view from their front edge down the whole length of the lake was enchanting. As is usual in such cases there were marble walks, a large building for the use of the Maharajah, as well as several pavilions, each with its walk or balcony overlooking the water's edge.

The lake was set amid gently sloping, wooded hills, and on the left foreshore were a few gleaming white houses in large gardens. It was indeed a delicious spot to come upon in this somewhat arid land. The calm spaciousness of the great extent of water with the scented paths behind was made for romance to which no one but the most unsensitive of men could fail to respond. It was so perfectly in harmony with the natural surroundings that even the buildings did not appear to intrude.

At the far end of the gardens, where there was an overflow, I came upon an Indian at his laundry and ablutions. He did not see me looking down at him for several moments, but when he did so he was very confused and all but fell backwards into deep water. Had he done so I wondered if I should have had to dive in and rescue him.

Leaving the gardens on my way home I came upon eleven Jain priests squatting in a rough circle under

a large pipal tree close to a temple. They were weird and wonderful to look at, being naked except for loin-cloths, smeared with white ash, and red and yellow ochre, and on their foreheads were the large, gaudy caste marks. I greeted them, one or two smiled, and then I found myself squatting beside them in the circle where I must have made a strange contrast in my cream poplin suit, white sun-helmet, and sun-glasses. We were extremely polite and friendly towards each other, and I told them who I was, where I was going, and what I had seen. I remained for about a quarter of an hour, and after they had offered me water, which I politely refused, I regretfully departed because it was getting late and luncheon awaited me. Had I been able to speak Hindustani more fluently I should have sacrificed that meal.

I was in the act of having a cold beer in the living-room of the guest-house just before luncheon when the butler came in and said that a motor car, together with a guide, had arrived for me from the palace. Pleased at this news I hastened out to the porch, but stopped short in the doorway. Before me was a kind of small lorry whose condition was only a shade better than that of the mail bus. Standing beside it was a small person dressed in European clothes who greeted me in English.

"Good morning, sir. The private secretary says he is sorry, but this is the only motor he has available. I am to take you to see the city."

"Oh, you are, are you?" I replied. "Well, go back at once and tell the private secretary that I cannot possibly intrude further upon his kindness, and that I have no intention of using this vehicle."

"Oh, sir, I could not possibly do that, sir. The private secretary would be very angry with me."

"All right. Then wait whilst I write him a letter," I said, grinding my teeth.

Going back into the room I sat down and wrote :

'DEAR PRIVATE SECRETARY,

'I have just seen the vehicle you have so kindly sent for my use. I feel that my presence here has already given you enough trouble and I cannot intrude further upon your kindness. I have already seen much upon my feet and I am leaving the State to-morrow morning. I will write in due course to the Resident.'

This letter was dispatched and I awaited results which I suspected would give full scope to my singular ability for being able to be politely very rude indeed. One immediate result was that the butler's manner towards me changed ; in fact he addressed me as *Huzoor* (prince).

I was having my afternoon tea when the butler came to my bedroom and informed me that the private secretary had arrived and would like to see me.

"Tell him that I deeply regret it, but I cannot receive him. Tell him also, that I have said all I have to say in my letter."

The butler's mouth opened.

"But, *Huzoor*, it is the private secretary himself."

I jumped off the bed in a feigned rage.

"Go, Father of Insolence. Give the answer at once," I commanded.

The man fled, only to return as I expected he would do.

"The private secretary says, sahib, that he wishes most urgently to see you."

"Return and say I will not receive him. And don't you dare to come back again."

The private secretary departed.

At sunset I was once again on the roof when the butler appeared. His manner made me grin because it showed almost tearful supplication.

"Huzoor, the private secretary is here and wishes to see you."

"Oh, is he?" I replied, suppressing deep satisfaction. "Well, go and tell him that I will consider the matter."

I had, of course, gone far enough and must now see the man, and so, after keeping him kicking his heels for ten minutes downstairs, I told the butler to show him up; he should come to me. Whilst awaiting his appearance I hitched up my trousers for battle, a battle which would need all the concentrated politeness and skill that I could muster.

A slim young man came towards me, I nodded my head in greeting, and kept him standing.

"How very kind of you to come and see me," I said, as an opening move.

"It is nothing, sir. I am so sorry I could not come before. I am very sorry indeed. I hope you are not angry?"

"Angry?" I replied, as if the word had never crossed my mind. "Why should I be? Your kindness in sending that motor this morning enchanted me."

There followed a pause, quite a long one, during which I sipped from my glass and appeared to be enthralled by the sunset.

"I am so very sorry, sir, that I could not send you anything better. It was the only one I had at my disposal," said the private secretary at last.

"Why, of course, I quite understand," I answered, turning my head slowly towards him. "Please don't bother to say anything more about it. You have been so very kind."

There followed another pause, much longer, and which I found very tiresome, but necessary. I was thankful for the sunset, it was of great assistance.

"Well, I am very sorry indeed, sir," said the man, being forced to speak again. "I shall be delighted if you will accept the use of my own car to-morrow. I have it here now if you would care to use it."

"No, you are really being too kind," I countered. "I really cannot accept such a generous offer ; besides, I leave to-morrow morning. You see, I fully realize what a nuisance I have been, and I am quite overcome by all the attention I have been given."

This was too much, even for an Indian, and they are skilled at this kind of game. He pleaded, and finally begged me to accept his offer. I continued to protest my inability to accept, but gave way at last.

"Well, since you are so insistent it would be rude of me to refuse. I accept your offer, but such consideration overwhelms me."

The man's face cleared.

"You will remain to-morrow ?"

"Yes, and I should like to start my sightseeing as early as possible. Would it be asking too much for nine o'clock ?"

"Yes, sir, my car shall be here at that time. Thank you very much indeed, sir."

I smiled sweetly and indicated that the interview was at an end. The private secretary departed, leaving me to sigh deeply. That interview had been more exhausting than I had imagined it would be, but the results were to be most satisfactory.

I was smoking a cigarette after breakfast the next morning when a splendid limousine slid into the porch and the private secretary, wreathed in smiles, stepped out.

"Good morning, sir. I hope that you have slept well? Have you been given all that you require?"

"Yes, thank you. I slept excellently and everything is most comfortable," I replied.

The man's manner suggested that he was now in the tenth heaven of delight at this good news, and, although I tried very hard, I could not suppress a broad grin. It is difficult, however, to maintain an air of polite aloofness and to grin at the same time.

"If I might suggest it, we should see the old palace this morning, and this afternoon you could go out and visit the many places of interest in the country."

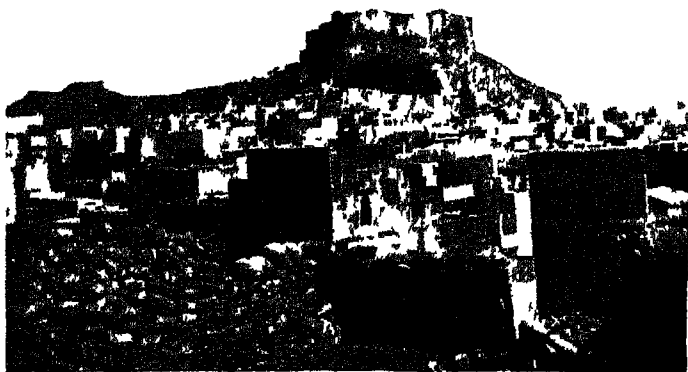
I agreed that this would suit me very well, and after collecting my sun-helmet and other necessities, I was ushered into the car and we set out. It was explained to me that the Maharajah did not now use the old palace, but lived in another not far away and in strict retirement. At the gateway of the used palace the private secretary left me saying that pressing work unfortunately prevented him from accompanying me on my tour, but it appeared that the guide sitting in front was of singular competence. I was secretly

delighted that I was not to be afflicted with the secretary's presence.

The palace we were to visit was built on the lower slopes of a steep hill within the limit of the city walls. The interior was very similar to many such other places, being a mass of living- and reception-rooms, gardens, shaded walks, and courts. I found two thrones and a state bed of much interest, but an atmosphere of stuffy ornateness hung over everything, where the crude colourings and decorations were most depressing, making you feel how unpleasant it would be to have to live in such surroundings. I detest coloured glass, as opposed to good stained glass, and every Indian, high or low, has an irrepressible passion for this glass, mixing as many colours as possible. Many of the smaller rooms in this palace reminded me of Houses of Meditation in cheap hotels at home, nearly all of which have the crude coloured glass windows. In India pastel colours are almost unknown ; if you have a colour let it be as vivid as possible.

My guide was fully determined that I should miss nothing, and he poured out a continual stream of information, only a fraction of which I retained. The little guide-book from which I have already quoted says the following of the palace :

‘ . . . throughout Rajputana, which boasts of many fine palaces, that of Bundi is allowed to possess the first rank, for it is indebted to the situation not less than to the splendid additions which it has continually received : for it is an aggregate of palaces, and yet the whole so well harmonizes, and



(Top) A DISTANT VIEW OF THE FORT AT JODHPUR

(Bottom) THE LOVELY HAREM GATE AT AMBER





the character of the architecture is so uniform, that its breaks or fantasies appear only to rise from the peculiarity of the position and serve to diversify its beauties.'

I am not quite sure what it all means, but I do not think I can improve upon it.

Exhausted from being made to climb up and down so many steps, we left the palace and made our way down the hill and so into a courtyard of the used palace, where I was shown several wild animals. There were small tigers chained to posts, deer, and leopards, and they all showed displeasure at my approach. It was, however, a fully grown leopard in a small cage which impressed me the most, it being malignant fury and hate personified. It put its head on one side, showed all of its pink throat, and used language which left me no delusions as to its feelings towards me. The animals were in fair condition, but savage from continual teasing by the palace servants.

After luncheon I was taken off to visit the Kshar Bagh, which is a large walled garden where the members of the ruling house are cremated and cenotaphs erected over the place of burning. There are altogether sixty-six of these monuments, some of which are worth looking at. It is a cool, pretty spot, and on a moonlit night it is easy to imagine those departed royalties squatting on their cenotaphs and whispering to each other of the long-lost glories.

From here a good road led off into the country to a shooting and fishing lodge which stands in large grounds in which are many long and narrow ponds full of large fish. At one time it must have been an

important place, because it is surrounded by extensive ruins mouldering ungracefully in the strong sunlight.

There followed other country and royal estates, but it was hot, the glare somewhat tiresome, and I was becoming bored. There were so many gardens, walks, fish-ponds, and stuffy rooms, and, of course, the coloured glass, that I longed to get back to the teeming life of the city. So much of what I was shown was more than half dead, being rarely used, and smelling of damp and neglect. I have spoken of the depressing effect of the dead city close to Jaipur, but at least those ruins had some dignity in starkness—these neglected estates were as enlivening as an elderly spinster clad in *crêpe* and jet sitting in her Victorian living-room.

Having shed the car and the guide I went for a stroll in the city after tea for the last time, and in the maze-like back streets there was something of interest, or worthy of note, every few paces. One house in every ten, for example, had painted on the wall facing the street, the picture of a large trotting elephant to whose back leg was attached a ring and piece of broken chain. On its back was a rajah waving a sword, and the whole was executed in brilliant colours. This state has undoubtedly a complex with regard to elephants, because apart from the painting there are statues of them and several live ones, and much of the state's history manages to bring in an elephant or two.

There were shrines and small temples, each with a bell in the porch at the tops of the steps. A worshipper rang it before he entered and so called the attention of the god to his arrival. It is interesting to note that

the same procedure is carried out in the temples of Japan.

In all kinds of unexpected places were the unusual water points. I call them water points for lack of a better word, they being neither wells nor tanks, but a combination of the two. Driven down at a steep angle, deep into the earth, are long flights of steps, even those of the smallest point, being of considerable width. At the bottom, about seventy feet, is a square pool from which water is drawn. In the gloom, on three sides, the green-stained walls rise sheer to the sky and pigeons make their homes in the nooks and crannies near the top, cooing and fighting.

These water points are dotted about all over the country-side, in fields, and by roadsides, many being vast and highly ornamented. There is a particularly fine one outside the city and on the far side of the market square. Here there are terraces, balconies, and arches, and the long flights of steps sweep gracefully downwards. I went down to the bottom of this one and looked at the water which was jet black and highly suspicious.

Suddenly, and for no particular reason, I was stricken in the middle of the city with an urgent desire to return to my own people. I was sure I knew nothing of these people of Bundi, and was merely picking at a surface which I could never hope to penetrate. It was as if I were standing penniless outside a cinema, trying to see the film being shown inside from looking at the advertisements. To know another race you have not only to live among them, but with them, a point many travellers seem to miss, perhaps fortunately.

On the way home I debated with myself on the reason for this sudden race-sickness, and came to the conclusion that it was because I had had a surfeit of Indian life. Had I not been entirely alone it would have been different, but I had not spoken more than a few casual words to a person of my own race, apart from the American, for close upon three weeks and it was now time for me to do so again.

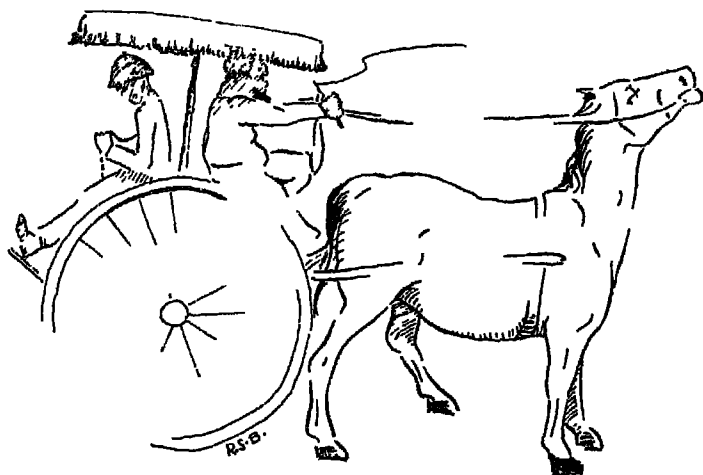
I had intended to go to Udaipur, Baroda, and Indore, but I changed these plans and decided to go north to Agra and Delhi, and from comfortable, modern hotels see if the Taj Mahal and the old Delhis still cast their spells over me as they had done sixteen years before.

The return to Kotah was made in state, the private secretary's car and driver having been placed at my disposal and a special lorry provided for my luggage and bearer. The private secretary and I parted as if we were affectionate brothers, and I promised to write to the Resident and say how much I had enjoyed my stay.

I have decided that, although I did visit Kotah City again, it is hardly worthy of mention. There are, however, two vast wooden gates at the entrance to the city which are of interest, being generously sprinkled with huge, very-pointed spikes, their use being to prevent elephants from being employed as battering-rams.

The vehicle, however, which conveyed me to Kotah and back from the Dak bungalow whilst awaiting my train northwards, is worth a few paragraphs. It was known as a gharry, being a two-wheeled affair where the passengers sit facing the rear with their backs

towards the driver. I picked my particular gharry because the single horse looked so fat, glossy, and well cared for, but his mother was undoubtedly a she-ass. There are few things in life so exhausting to your patience as an animal who refuses to move, purely from a sense of stubborn cussedness.



I am normally a kind-hearted person, who abhors the ill treatment of animals as strongly as most people, but before the trip was over I was so furious with that horse that I could have slain it. For the first mile it trotted along very well, but on our coming to a slight rise, it slowed down and finally stopped. The driver clucked, and flicked it with the whip, but it had no effect and he was forced to climb down and drag it along. When the beast was moving quite fast the driver leapt back into his seat with surprising agility; he did this five times going, and eight on returning from the city. I was filled with admiration for his patience, which was unusual in Indians, and was far greater

than my own ; I should have whacked that horse severely had it been mine. Altogether it would have been quicker to walk had it not been so warm. When paying off the man I inquired concerning the matter, and he smiled a tired smile.

“ What the Heaven-born says is true. The horse is the father of fifty devils, but he is all that I have, and I must live. To beat him has no effect ; were he a wife I should soon have trained him.”

## CHAPTER IV

THE journey to Agra was of considerable interest, because, being performed by day, I travelled second class. The only space that could be found was in a compartment full of black-robed, European priests. They were friendly and hastily made room, but they were fat, decidedly so, and I travelled for some distance squeezed between what might have been two plump bolsters.

They departed in due course and their places were taken by two Indians, one an old man, and the other much younger. In a short time I was discussing many subjects with the elder of the two men, and not the least interesting was the purdah system. It arose out of a question of mine as to why, now that India was striving so hard to become westernized, the purdah was still enforced on their womenfolk.

"Because, sahib, we are wiser than *thou* art in this matter, and know it has many advantages which you English might well enjoy. When I was a young man my father, who was astute, sent me to live and work among your people." The old man chuckled and grinned a toothless grin because he kept his set of false teeth in a can on the floor at his feet. "When I returned to my village, as I often did at my father's bidding, they would not believe the tales I told them. Aye, the sahibs are very wise in many matters, but in



others they are as foolish as a hen, especially in regard to their womenfolk."

"Tell me, O Father of Wisdom," I smiled, "in what manner of way are we foolish with our women."

The old man regarded me closely before he replied.

"I can see that the sahib is not as other sahibs are, but he will not be angry if I speak openly?"

"No, of course not. Speak your mind and I will listen and doubtless learn much that is unknown to me."

"Well, sahib, every creature, from the sparrow to the elephant, guards its mate, and will fight for it even to death, and who are we, but animals. But the sahibs are different, and their women belong to many men."

"Oh, ho! That is a crooked remark," I said, laughing.

"But it is true. I know it is so. Sahib, in life only two things matter; to live and to create life; everyone knows it to be the truth. There are times when no woman can be faithful, however hard she tries. Knowing this, we guard our women and keep them from temptation, and then we are certain that our sons *are* our sons."

The man glanced across at me to see how I was accepting this insinuation against my people, but seeing the interest on my face he continued.

"But it is not so with your people; even the youngest girls hold secret converse with men strange to them. Aye, I know, for have I not seen it with my own eyes. They are kissed, and fondled, and words of false love are whispered to them, not only by one man, but many, and the fathers and the husbands do not take notice. Thy women sit with evil-minded men in

dark places in the gardens ; in the carriages, and even in the sleeping rooms ; it is indeed shameless, and we are not surprised that there is always much trouble and evil talk. Ah, sahib, you should hear what is said in the servants' houses. Thy servants, they come and they go, and they say nothing, but they are not deaf or blind."

"But there is little harm," I expostulated. "We trust our women."

"Therein lies a very great foolishness, sahib. Women must be guarded and not trusted. Where passion is concerned (he used another phrase which unfortunately cannot be printed) they are weak. Do not misunderstand me, sahib, they are not bad, but animals. We are all animals in this matter."

The old man broke off at this point and I was afraid that this was all he was going to say. But he took up the thread of his conversation again after removing his shoes and placing them on the seat beside him.

"Sahibs are always divorcing their wives and taking fresh ones. We Indians ask why do the sahibs marry ? I have heard it said, it is because they love as we do, and for the care of the children. For the love I do not know, but the children, that is not true. Is it not true that the children belong entirely to the ayahs ? I have even heard it said that the mem-sahibs do not suckle their babies. When they grow, your people send their small sons across the black water and the women have nothing to do and think only of the nautch."

At this point I broke in and tried to explain our point of view, but the man refused to be convinced.

"Sahib, I have talked with many who have been

even to England, and they say that it is even so there. It is all a very great shamelessness. You asked me, sahib, why we keep the purdah, and I have tried to speak what is in my mind, but I will go on. We who veil and keep our women hidden live happily, and our wives and daughters are contented. Aye, I know you do not believe, sahib, but I to whom death approaches do not speak lies. I am old and have gathered some wisdom. We know more of love than your people. We do not divorce our wives, but we seek with knives the hearts of those who attempt to take them from us. My wife was happy and lived a woman's life, and did not try to be a man, as do the mem-sahibs. In the home we Indians live with our women, but outside we live with men. The sahib, as I see it, lives always with women, and that is not good, because men do not think as do women."

Here again I interrupted.

"But surely a wife should be a companion to her husband? How can she be so if she is shut up all the time? We consider that a woman has a right to live as freely as a man."

"Have your people always thought as they do now?" inquired the man, peering across at me.

"Well, no, they have not," I admitted. "But now we have become more sensible."

"Are your people happier for thinking thus?"

This was a question that I found difficult to answer, and the old man saw it and laughed.

"Do not answer, sahib. I know. We should end this talk because it has as many thorns as a bush. But, sahib." He laughed again. "If we were to unveil our women many would find that they are not so lovely

as we thought them to be. The ill featured now share equally with the lovely ; it is not so with the mem-sahibs."

"Here indeed you speak the truth," I answered, laughing. "In the land of the Turks when they unveiled their women I hear that many complained bitterly, praying Allah to restore the veil."

From this point onwards we talked of other matters which I have recorded elsewhere and cannot repeat. I have given this conversation in full because, although the subject is threadbare, it was no mean achievement to get an Indian to talk so freely to a stranger. The younger man took little part in it, except, now and again, forcibly to agree with his elder's point of view.

It was dark when the train drew into Agra station, but in a short while I was settled in my room in the excellent Cecil Hotel. In the early morning I left my bed and went to have tea on the tiny balcony which overlooked the gardens. It was that glorious period in India, during the cold weather, between the late dawn and early day which is so full of distant mists, flame-flecked skies, chubby cloudlets, and calm freshness.

Leaning forward on my chair I looked towards where the Taj Mahal must lie. There was a small gap in the trees and the distant mists shone like pearly gossamer across the tiny strip of horizon. Could I see the Taj ? Was that really a faint outline of the glorious dome, or was it just my imagination ? I strained my eyes. Yes, there it was, but not a reality, only a child's dream of a fairy palace, so ethereal was it. The dome, the size of half a threepenny piece, was covered with a white, death shroud, but, as I gazed enthralled, the shroud, in the swiftly-rising sun, turned from white to cream,

cream to amber, amber to gold, and then, as the mists faded, the dome emerged clear-cut in all its gleaming whiteness. It had been a picture painted by angels and conceived by a divinity.

From the sublime to the ridiculous I looked down on to the edge of the drive directly beneath me where a large, fantastic bird stalked solemnly to and fro. It was a species of heron, having long legs and a fairly heavy and very pointed beak. One eye, a bright red and filled with a great naughtiness, was turned up expectantly towards me, every now and again. The bird resembled an aged, but still sprightly *roué*, and I could almost imagine I heard a suggestive chuckle. I threw it small pieces of buttered toast and it went after them sedately. This, however, soon attracted several mynahs, sparrows, and two crows, and the heron-like bird soon lost its dignity in the scramble that followed each piece of toast. But it was the sparrows, like their breed the world over, who were the most daring, dashing within reach of that deadly beak and darting away again before it could be brought into action.

The Taj Mahal is the most talked of, written about, and photographed monument in the world. Writers, poets, and painters have all tried in their various ways to show its glories and the appeal that it has for them. The result of this is that those who go to visit this tomb are generally keyed up to unusual heights of expectation, and the wonderful thing about it is the fact that it never falls short of what we hope for, and no one, however sophisticated they may be, can fail to admire.

From long and bitter experience I have come to

treat with suspicion anything which is unduly lauded, refusing to bow down in opposition to my sentiments just because everyone else does so. It was in this frame of mind that I set out to revisit the Taj Mahal ; the previous visit had been when I was much younger and more unsophisticated. For a short time, and with perverseness inherent to human nature, I hoped I should be disappointed. But I was not. The monument really is all that it is claimed to be.

I will not vie with far more able writers than I am in description, but will confine myself to a few constructive criticisms, not of the building which is above such things, but of its surroundings. Before doing so I will give a few details often forgotten by writers, eager to proceed with their impressions.

The tomb is not old as such things can be, being commenced in 1630, and was intended to hold only the body of Arjmand Banu, wife of the Emperor Shah Jehan, and more commonly known as Mumtaz Mahal. The Emperor died before he could build his own tomb and in consequence is buried beside his much-loved wife.

The main building once had silver doors, but these were looted by the Jats in 1764. It was badly shaken by an earthquake, and once someone very nearly succeeded in pulling it down and selling the marbles. I regret to say he was an Englishman.

The entrance leads into a large courtyard where, on the left, is the main, double gateway, which in itself is a very fine building. Steps lead upwards into a dim hall from where the excited visitor gets his first view of the Taj Mahal through the far gateway, from which another flight of steps leads down into the grounds.

From a balcony exactly over the centre of this gateway you get by far the best view of the monument, and here comes my first criticism. Unless visitors have been warned by someone beforehand they are not aware of this vantage point. Secondly, if they do know of it, difficulty is experienced in gaining access to it. A small doorway on the right leads to it, but this is nearly always locked and a custodian (never present when required) has to be summoned and then given a tip. Everyone should be directed to this spot, and not debarred from it. Seen by moonlight from this balcony the monument is a sight never to be forgotten, but complete surrounding darkness is necessary for the full enjoyment. At present the view is spoiled by the bright rays from a large hanging lamp in the hall just behind your back as you stand on the balcony. This lamp is a fine one, but surely it might remain unlit when the moon is full ?

The tomb is erected on the edge of the right bank of the River Jumna, a turgid yellow stream with low, sloping banks. This spot was chosen by the Emperor so that from his palace in what is now the Fort he might gaze upon the resting-place of his beloved. Between the platform on which the building stands and the gateway are extensive and well-laid-out gardens, and on the direct route from the gateway is a wide, paved walk, down the centre of which are lily ponds. On either side of the conduits is a single line of cypress trees, but from an artistic point of view the avenue nearest to the monument has been badly laid out, definitely preventing a full appreciation of the building as a whole. This is clearly shown in the photographs, and can be compared to ruining the beautiful façade

of a country house by taking the approach avenue up to the front door. I am of the opinion that the trees of this second avenue should be made to curve gracefully outwards towards the platform; this could be done without undue cost or reconstruction.

When the visitor has made a tour of the inside of the tomb he comes out and naturally gravitates to the rear, where an unpleasant surprise waits him. Thrilled and exalted by what he has seen, the view that now confronts him has the effect of a cold shower. Directly below is the river with its mud, laundry, and bathing places, and in the distance the truly hideous iron railway bridge which spans the river above the city. On the far bank of the river is a wide area of flat, depressing country where once Babar had a palace, but which now badly needs planting with trees and tidying up.

If money cannot be found to carry out these obvious and very necessary improvements, why is a fund not started to provide it? A collecting box, or boxes, at the main gateway would soon produce a considerable sum, few visitors begrudging one or more rupees on leaving a spot which has given them so much enjoyment. I fear, however, that I am a faint voice crying in the wilderness, or else why has nothing been done about it? I have committed a crime in daring to suggest that all is not perfect.

I said earlier that I would not attempt to give a description of the Taj Mahal, but I saw it by full moonlight and cannot resist the temptation to record a slight impression of that divine spectacle. Divine is the correct word because we connect it with cold, distant augustness, and this is what the monument appears to be in the white light of the moon. It is a symbol of



feminine chastity in its most unapproachable form, and we stand awed by the glacial combination of light and beauty outlined against the purple night sky.

There is nothing fragile or delicate about the tomb, it being a particularly solid piece of work, and yet the design is such as to give quite the reverse effect, and this is especially so by moonlight.

When contemplating some really beautiful thing you should let your mind go free and attempt to absorb the spectacle without conscious effort, this acting as a purge upon the mind, clearing it of false values and petty thoughts. The night I stood upon the balcony and gazed down upon the tomb I did this, but with peculiar and unusual results. I found I was becoming seriously annoyed with myself. What an idiot, what a triple fool I was. Why did I not strive to rise above the petty things in life ; let them rattle against my mind like peas on a tin roof ? So much of my life was occupied with little things that did not matter, either to myself or to anyone else. What had I done since I came out to India which was of any value ? Nothing, not even my work had been of the least consequence and I had deliberately allowed myself to become absorbed by the amazing trivialities of the stations in which I lived.

These disturbing, but excellent, thoughts were interrupted by the sound of voices from below—they were American and penetrating. I looked over the edge of the balcony and saw a man and a woman standing at the top of the steps which led down into the grounds.

"Well, here's the Taj, Sadie. How d'yer like it ? We've sure come a long way to see it."

"Oh, Aylmer, isn't it wonderful ?" said Sadie,

clutching the man's arm. "I'll tell the world it's a sight for sore eyes. Just look at that dome; it sure reminds me of Washington."

An argument, which was quite friendly, now developed because Sadie wished to remain where she was and Aylmer desired to go forward at once. Expressive language was used on both sides until at last Sadie said in an exasperated voice :

"Aw, Aylmer, you're behaving like a cold sausage in a hot dog."

I shuddered and then laughed quietly. The Taj Mahal and cold sausage—only an American could produce such a combination of thought. I left them still arguing and went home to bed.

The Fort at Agra is as fine as the more famous one in Delhi, and it has the added advantage of not being quite so obviously filled with barracks. Much of the glory of these palaces has vanished, vandals having picked out the semi-precious stones which were floral inlay in the marbles, and in the halls, private chambers, and courtyards, the gilded ceilings and quaint frescoes have gone and only the shell remains. Some feeble attempt at reconstruction and repair has been made in the palace at Delhi.

It is infuriating to read, or hear, of some wealthy man spending huge sums on the purchase of pictures, books, or some such things, not because they are particularly beautiful, but because experts say they are rare. How well that money might have been spent in reviving the glories of these palaces. What a splendid memorial, and how much finer to be remembered in such a manner than by a smug oil painting in a city hall, or worse still a statue in some grubby square. After

death art treasures are most surely sold and the money spent by some riotous descendant. It may be said that the revival should be carried out by wealthy Indians to whom these palaces are a part of their heritage, but what an opportunity exists to bid for fame by those with imagination and large bank balances. How satisfying to watch a rebirth made possible by yourself.

I considered these things as I strolled through the audience chambers, courtyards, and living-rooms in the palace at Agra. Here is the spot where the Emperor Shah Jehan slept, chosen so that he could look out upon the Taj Mahal; near by are the rooms of the women of the harem with pockets in the walls with their tiny openings only just large enough to admit the hand of a woman, and in which the jewels were put for safe custody during the night. Not far distant from these places is the Gem Mosque where that most ungrateful son of the Emperor imprisoned his father.

Between the Fort and the grounds of the Taj Mahal are the remains of what must once have been a large and flourishing city. There are many acres of uneven ground sparsely covered with low trees and shrubs, where every foot of ground is a mass of broken brick with which is mixed painted shards, pathetic pieces of broken glass bangles, and coloured beads. It is possible to trace the ancient streets, and the remains of very solid walls, and now unrecognizable buildings protrude just above the thin layer of soil. I felt an itch to dig here, a sensation always at my fingertips in such places. Once, many years ago in northern India, I was rewarded with a find which I carried off in triumph. It consisted of several thin, long-handled

implements in silver. Puzzled as to what their use could have been I exhibited them in the crowded ante-room of a mess, whereupon a doctor looked at them and told me, amid much lewd laughter, that they were used by midwives. Being young I flung them away in disgust—I wish now that I had kept them.

Agra City has no attractions, being dirty, crowded, smelly, and a place to be avoided, as is the cantonment bazaar. This latter place is quite the most dismal I have met, where the shops are caverns of dusty, gloomy shoddiness, never containing what is wanted, and such goods as are displayed for sale look as if they had been there for many years.

The cantonments, apart from the area around the Cecil Hotel and the Taj Mahal, are mouldy, showing clearly that, from a military point of view, this is a second-class, neglected little station which no one ever dreams of visiting unless they are forced to do so. I went to call upon the Gunner mess and was deeply shocked. The general air of neglect of the building and the grounds is, or was (perhaps someone has done something about it), a disgrace to the Regiment and a lasting shame upon those responsible for keeping such places in good repair. I nearly wrote to the local general on the subject, but refrained, knowing that I should merely be told to mind my own business.

## CHAPTER V

MY stay in Delhi was a medley of experiences and, in consequence, this chapter will be a series of impressions rather than an attempt at description ; besides so much has been written about the place.

The train from Agra arrived late in the afternoon at the great central station, and being dusty, unfed, and tired, I lost my temper. The porter from the hotel could not be found, although every other porter from every other hotel, and there were many, implored me to come to his establishment. The man, found at last at the exit, was cursed, whereupon he called up a taxi and in a soothing manner coaxed me into it. I refused to be soothed, and on arriving at the hotel raised my voice in bitter complaint regarding the state and age of the taxi, and the annoyance of having to look for a man whose job it was to seek me out. There were more soothings, but on being shown my rooms I promptly objected to them, and returning to the office furiously condemned their size, position, and general undesirableness. I was given much finer ones at the same cost.

There are now two separate Delhi cantonments, the New and the Old. Visiting the New is rather like going to a house-warming in a recently built and furnished house ; charming, and well laid out, but

with no atmosphere at all, whereas the Old is pathetic and dying, but reeks of history and lived-in-ness.

The story of how the site for the new Government buildings was chosen is interesting. Long and raging had been the discussions of the Selection Committee, who would not agree, each side being sharply divided, and firmly convinced that the other was being stupidly obstinate. Lord Hardinge, then Viceroy, annoyed at the futility of these proceedings, rode out one day and came to a spot which he considered suitable and killed instantly all further argument by saying bluntly : " This is the spot on which Government House will be built."

I went out to New Delhi prepared to be disappointed, but I was not. The whole layout of the Government area is magnificent, and fills you with admiration. It is a work of genius, and equals anything Rome built, not perhaps in size, but certainly in conception and breadth of view. The great King's Way, with its stupendous vistas, the Secretariat buildings, and the Viceroy's House are all truly imperial, and even the much-derided Council Chamber is in keeping with the whole.

There are, however, two glaring faults in regard to the Viceroy's House. A tall and far from pleasing column, on the top of which is a four-pointed star, has been set up in front of the main entrance to the house, and this, from an artistic point of view, is a major crime ; and it makes you wonder who could have been responsible for its erection. I longed to knock it down.

The second fault concerns the fine dome, which crowns the middle of the building. Why in the

name of Apollo was it built of three different coloured stones so that it resembles a layered cake ? This is not only a fault, but one in shockingly bad taste.

Why call the place the Viceroy's House ? What a clumsy, heavy, and thoroughly unsuitable name, and as bad as calling Buckingham Palace, the King's House. If a better name could not be found, why not have kept Viceregal Lodge, or Government House, both well-known and accepted names ? I should have voted for Viceregal Palace. After all, even the least important of the Indian princes lives in a palace, and why not the Viceroy ?

To describe my luncheon at the Viceroy's House is in bad taste, but I have included it because many readers, like myself, see so little of the inner lives of the very great that a glimpse is of more than passing interest.

One morning a gorgeously clad orderly arrived at the hotel with an invitation to luncheon, and I was thrilled. The Viceroy is a king in all but name, and holds an appointment so high that he is second only to the King-Emperor, to whom he is alone responsible ; and, in consequence, the Court is a regal one.

My young bearer, when told the news, was stricken dumb with pride, and swelling almost visibly hurried away to tell the other servants that his sahib was to eat with the great lord, and that he, in my shadow, was now a person of importance.

I set out in the best car that could be found, and in due course we slid into the beautifully kept grounds, and drew up at the private entrance where I was greeted by many of the scarlet-and-gold-clad Indian servants. Ferribly hoping that the party would be

a small and informal one, I was guided through many long and confusing corridors, and so into one of the private drawing-rooms. This was a large, pleasant room, decorated in pastel colours and filled with the usual furnishings, including a large grand piano and many silver-framed photographs of royalties and other celebrities.

Two aides-de-camp in lounge suits greeted me, and almost at once we were joined by a young, pleasant American, who was the only other guest apart from those staying in the house. When offered cigarettes and pre-luncheon drinks I learned that the party was neither to be small, nor informal.

The guests staying in the house now began to drift in and to join us as we stood beside the piano. There was a woman of very high degree, another not quite so high, a man who was on his way to New Zealand, and several other people whose names I did not catch. I attempted to make elegant conversation with the Woman of High Degree, but with little success, in fact I made a serious *faux pas* by commenting upon the strain of being a Vicereine. I went even further and suggested that it was strange anyone should take on such a very arduous position. This was received with an icy stare and she abruptly turned away. I remembered later that she herself, under another name, had been a Vicereine.

The other woman was charming, and we discussed Kashmir until an A.D.C. came forward and told the American and myself that we must follow him up the room to be introduced to the governor of a province who was due to arrive. Led to the far end of the long room we were made to stand side by side : the



governor appeared in due course, we were introduced, and he passed on to join the party beside the piano, but we had to remain where we were to be introduced to Their Excellencies. Like two naughty schoolboys awaiting the coming of the head master, the American and I stood and waited for several minutes, whilst those by the piano smoked, drank, and chatted. It was a trying ordeal and would have been worse had I been alone, but we grinned at each other and waited.

I was beginning to wonder how much longer we should have to wait when another A.D.C. in full uniform appeared, and at his heels were Their Excellencies. The introduction took place, we followed the Viceroy down the room, and the whole party then swept on to a dining-room which opened out at the other end.

There were about twenty people present, and I found myself seated on Her Excellency's left. On her right was the governor of the province, on my left the New Zealand man, whilst facing me across the table was the Woman of High Degree. On her left was the Viceroy, who I thought was looking tired and not in very good health. The meal, a simple, pleasant one, served by Indians in full livery, now began, and a tiresome affair I found it to be. Her Excellency was engaged for the first half of the meal with the governor, but I had to be ready to talk to her when she turned to me; I tried to answer intelligently questions about New Zealand from the man on my left, whilst watching the Viceroy, whom I had never seen before. These activities were complicated by the fact of having to accept food and to eat it without disgracing myself by dropping something into my

lap, knocking over a glass, or some other such disaster, all distressingly liable to occur to a person in my position.

Stupidly I picked upon one of those entrées which are difficult to handle, where a knife must never be used and a fork, alone, inadequately fulfils its purpose. I gave up at last and used a knife as well as the fork, and in doing so dropped a point lower in the estimation of the Woman of High Degree opposite to me.

Her Excellency turned to me at last and we promptly became involved in a complicated misunderstanding so ludicrous that in the end we both laughed heartily and slipped easily into general conversation. Before leaving the table I remarked that she must find life far more strenuous than that at home, to which she made an illuminating reply. She stated that the only time her husband and herself had together during the day was at breakfast. This was for five years.

Once again in the drawing-room we split into groups, and I found myself talking to a woman who was unknown to me. How tiresome those after-luncheon periods always are. How much more sensible is the Chinese method where, directly after leaving the table, guests depart and the hosts can relax.

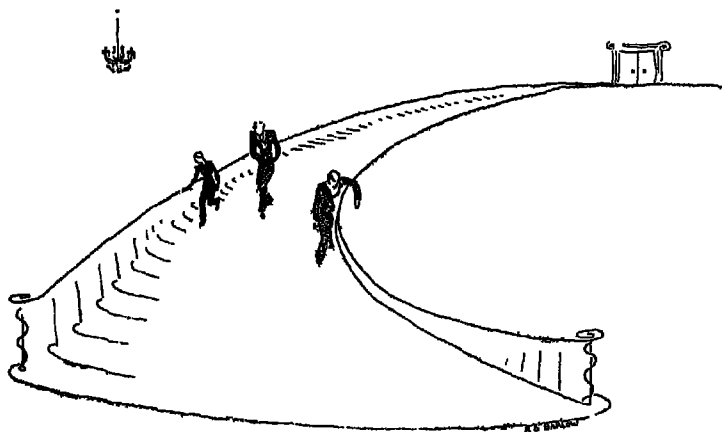
Their Excellencies retired in due course, and an A.D.C. came up and offered to show the American and myself over the house. The tour that followed was an amazing one, during which we saw some of the 340 rooms and one and a half miles of corridor. We were shown huge banqueting-halls and dining-rooms, vast reception-rooms, spacious ball-rooms and drawing-rooms, all of which were far too ornately decorated and furnished. There were acres of red

plush and highly coloured carpets, dozens of crimson and gilt chairs and settees, as well as hundreds of yards of gilding and frescoes. I remarked upon this display to the A.D.C. who grinned and agreed that it was somewhat overdone, but explained that it was for the benefit of Indians for whom this kind of decoration has a great appeal.

We wandered on and on until I said it was becoming late and that I must go. It was then the A.D.C. admitted what I had suspected was the case. He had lost himself.

"I've only been here three weeks, and it is a bit confusing, isn't it?" he remarked apologetically.

The American and I agreed in unison that it was, as we trotted hopefully up and down great marble staircases and down endless corridors. We were



saved by my suddenly recognizing a spot close to where I had entered the house, and after our hats and gloves had been recovered we departed.

On the way home I experienced a bout of indigestion, probably caused by taking too much exercise directly

after luncheon, a thing rarely done in the East. Which reminds me that few people know that the Lord Buddha attained Nirvana through the lowly gate of indigestion brought on by eating too much roasted pig when he was an old man. As Lockyard Kipling says : " Here is a pathetic note of human weakness too often missing from Eastern stories of the half-divine."

An interesting place in Old Delhi is the house of an unusually polished and charming seller of valuable Eastern curios. It is a low bungalow standing in a delightful garden facing Maiden's Hotel and is no ordinary shop, the owner being an elderly European gentleman who looks, with his grey, pointed, and well-trimmed beard, and groomed appearance, as if he were a diplomat of high standing. I went to call, as opposed to drifting into the house, and was greeted by a soft-footed servant who murmured politely. The owner then appeared and welcomed me with a pleasant smile.

" Lady — told me about your lovely things and said I must come and see you," I said. " Might I look around ? I'm too poor to be able to buy anything, but I love looking at beautiful things."

" But, of course. I am delighted. Is there anything in which you are particularly interested ? " inquired the old gentleman.

" Jade is what I should like to collect most of all, and I do know something about it."

" Ah, splendid. I have got some fine pieces. But first you must look around and then I will show them to you."

I was now left alone to wander about the purposely darkened rooms filled with illuminated show-cases, where every article was displayed to the best advantage. Never have I seen such a magnificent collection of alluring things, each crying out to be carried lovingly away ; but I soon knew that they were only to be bought by the wealthy.

There were pendants, bracelets, ear-rings, and anklets of rugged gold, studded with rubies, pearls, and sapphires, and they once belonged to ranees and lovely ladies of the harem. Whilst gazing at them I could fancy I heard the little shrieks of delight when first they were fastened by bearded, warrior-lovers around the slender necks, on tiny ears, or about dainty wrists.

There were jewelled daggers and savage swords, each with studded gold, or ivory, hilts. Cups, bowls, and goblets of beaten gold, or sunset agate, or amethyst ; miniatures and statuettes, each a treasure in itself. There were massive rings, glittering necklaces, pins for the hair, and delicate gold roses for the nose, to show off the sensitive curves of the nostrils.

Then came rooms filled with age-old tapestries, brocades, and carpets, to which still clung faint odours of perfumed rooms, or perhaps it was rank smoke from the pipes, or musk, myrrh, or the strong asafoetida. They came from out of the wild north across the deadly passes ; from the courts of the sensuous south ; and the virile palaces of the fighting Rajput states. What stories these furnishings could tell, and what vivid scenes of sudden death, intrigue, and love-making their presence conjured up.

I suddenly became aware that the old gentleman

was hovering nearby, and, turning, allowed myself to be led into a small and inner room which was lined by several tall, steel cases. There were rich carpets on the floor, and several tables and chairs, as well as a divan over which had been thrown a rug whose reds glowed deeply like those of an unpolished ruby.

My host offered me a heavy Turkish cigarette and I sat down whilst he gave a bunch of keys to a servant who opened one of the cases and took from it several black leather boxes which he placed on a table at my side. The old gentleman opened them one after another, showing that they contained dishes, bowls, and cups of carved white jade from China.

"They are very lovely, are they not?" he said as he handed me several pieces.

Examining them carefully and slowly I saw there was none of any real interest, they being the common jade, and not particularly well or delicately carved, and in consequence I was faced with an awkward situation. Did my host really think them to be very fine, or was he praising them in hopes of making a sale? Not wishing to hurt his feelings, I murmured that they were charming and that he was fortunate in owning them. He sensed, however, my real feelings, and smiled across at me through the blue haze of his cigarette smoke as he waved to the servant to replace the boxes.

Was I interested in carpets? I said that I was, and he insisted that I went into another room where he would show me a priceless fragment of a rug which had been loaned to a great museum in Europe. Lovingly he handed me a torn piece of carpet about two feet long and several inches in depth. It was

Persian and many hundreds of years old. Was it not superb ?

I handled the piece and was not impressed. It was so old that the colour and design had almost gone and had I seen it in any other place I should have passed it by as mere junk. It was beyond my power to praise it.

"I'm sorry to say that it doesn't appeal to me," I said slowly. "Of course, it is wonderful that it has lasted for so long, but I would not accept it as a gift, unless perhaps to try and sell it to some person with more money than taste."

This was rude of me, but the old gentleman took it very well, and smiling gently led me out on to the front drive where we sat down on chairs in the warm sunshine.

"You are very patient with me, but you see I'm one of those people who, as a general rule, will not say they like a thing when they do not," I explained, accepting another cigarette. "I think you have a very wonderful collection, and many of your things I should love to have, not because they are valuable, but because I think them attractive, or beautiful."

My host nodded and we sat awhile in silence.

"It has always been a source of much astonishment to me that mere age should command such fantastic prices," I continued. "Of course, certain things do become more lovely when mellowed by time; for example, brick, certain silks, and carpets, but it makes me smile when I read the extravagant praise that is poured out upon some piece of crude pottery, or carving, which has been dug out of some dead city, or tomb. Not long ago somebody showed me a

statuette in rough clay of a female figure said to have been fashioned by a Stone Age people.

“‘Isn’t it wonderful? I think it superb,’ they said, regarding it as if it were extremely alluring.

“‘I think it’s hideous and might have been made by a child of four,’ I replied bluntly.

“Do you know that person was most annoyed and actually said I didn’t know a beautiful thing when I saw it.”

My host laughed and asked me to continue.

“Your point of view is interestingly frank. I expect you went to see the Chinese Exhibition in London?”

“Yes, I did, and a pitiful affair it was, when you consider the vast store of sublime objects of Chinese art there is in China, and scattered about England. Many of the exhibits were shown simply because they were very old; their charm had long since departed, and yet they were raved about and said to be priceless. All London flocked there and stood with wondering eyes and falsely admiring words on their lips, simply because experts told them to do so, and they were afraid if they said what they really thought they would have been considered odd, and of mean understanding. Of course there were many lovely things there, but I am speaking of the exhibition as a whole.”

“Ah, yes. I understand,” said my host. “It is the old, old story of the wealthy taking pride only in possession, and allowing themselves to be guided, not by their own instincts, but by the opinion of experts. They are cowards and afraid of being accused of having bad taste, quite forgetting that



what may appeal to you may not do so to me. Because you pay a high price then it must be good, is the rule that they follow."

"Yes, how true that is," I said, getting up from my chair. "Now I must go because it is getting late."

On the way back to the hotel I considered how pathetic it is that we have to be educated to appreciate even natural beauty. How little we Occidentals have advanced. A boy of ten years has no more appreciation than a savage, and yet the lowest Chinese coolie, whose life is only one step higher than that of an animal, will instinctively cherish a simple and beautiful thing for its charm alone.

At sunset-time I wandered down to the deserted banks of the Jumna River where the low, yellow, turgid stream flowed gently between the many sand-banks. Here it was peaceful and lovely in a simple manner. A lonely fishing-bird meditated on a pale ochre sand-bank, and black against the apricot sky were several flights of homing birds. Through a faint haze the landscape was graciously mellowed, and on the far bank of the river stood several groves of trees out of which smoke drifted lazily, showing that the evening meals were in course of preparation. Peasants wended their way homeward, many carrying fat bundles of grasses upon their backs, and it was so still that I could plainly hear their voices across the water.

I came upon an aged ferry whose craft was moored to the far bank where it was being hurriedly loaded for the last trip of the day. Tiny donkeys were being

scurried down the steep bank to off load their burdens of grass on to the clumsy, flat-bottomed boat.

Then came a smooth-haired terrier belonging to some sahib, and who was being exercised by a bearer. He ran up and greeted me politely, but soon departed to hunt for mythical rats in the many dry and deep watercourses which scarred the open space. A watchful cur, outside one of the several huts nearby, shouted insults at him which he contemptuously ignored.

When about to jump across one of the watercourses I stumbled upon a quaint little scene. This particular course was a deep one, and not quite dry, because a trickle of water ran steeply towards the river. Almost at my feet, as I stood on the edge, were two naked infants playing together beside the water, and they were so deeply engrossed in their game that they did not sense my presence. Silent and interested I stood and wondered what the game could be. One was busily collecting tiny round pebbles and small pieces of driftwood, whilst the other, on his hands and knees, gathered up handfuls of damp, grey earth which he dumped beside the water in the form of a rough square; and in the middle of this was the growing pile of wood and stones. The collector of earth suddenly turned his head, looked up, and saw me. His eyes grew round, his mouth opened, and I was prepared for the long, dry howl of surprise and fright. But no, the tiny mouth closed again and he scowled at me.

“ Tell me, O Clever One, what game do you play ? ”  
I inquired, smiling.

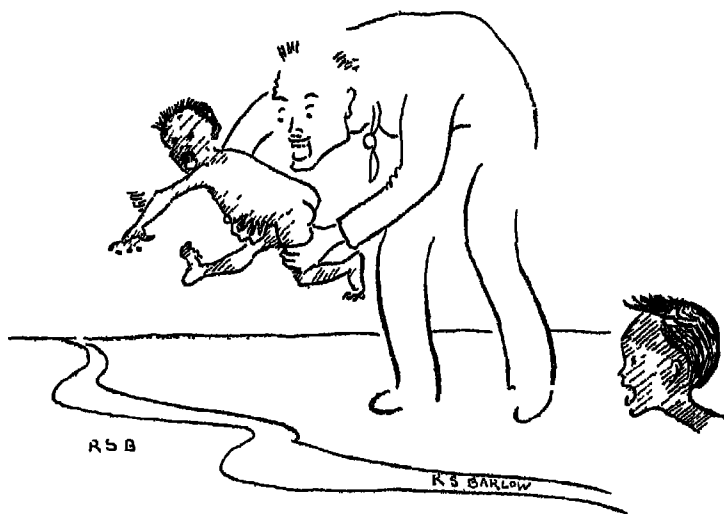
He of the pebbles, who had had his back to me,

was so surprised at the sound of my voice that he dropped what he was holding and sat down suddenly on his little bare behind. Although younger than his companion he had no fear of strange sahibs and wriggled around to face me.

"Sahib, we build a house before the water," he lisped. "It will be a fine one."

"Without doubt it will be worthy of a King of Delhi," I replied, stooping down. "May I lend my aid?"

"Never, sahib. It is we who build. We be great builders and know not the sahibs. My mother says the sahibs eat us when we are wicked. Have you eaten so, sahib?"



"Aye, many," I answered, laughing, "and sweet as corn they were."

The elder boy now scowled more deeply at me.

"This be foolish talk," he said. "Men do not eat

men. But all sahibs are as devils unchained, so says my father."

"Ho, ho. Then thou wouldst be eaten," I exclaimed, gnashing my teeth and making as if to jump down among them.

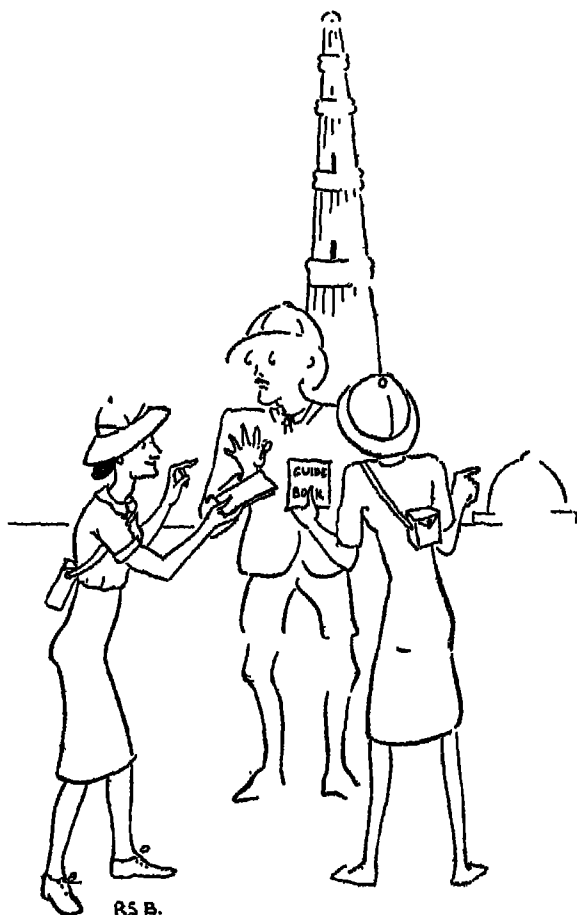
The effect was instantaneous. The child scrambled to his feet and fled up the watercourse, followed closely by his companion, and both roared with outraged fright. Leaping the trench I went upon my way wondering what fearful stories would be told to the parents.

If you engage a motor car and go out to New Delhi, and onwards past the aerodrome on a road which cuts across the stark remains of many Delhis, you will come at last to Lal Kot. Lal Kot is interesting and very old, and amid its ruins stands the famous tower known as the Kutab Minar. One of the astonishing features of this tower is that it still stands without blemish. Delhis have sprung up and vanished, battles have raged about it, and earthquakes shuddered its foundations, but it has surmounted them all, and rises superbly out of the ruins at its base.

It was first begun by Prithvi Raj about eight hundred years ago, so that his favourite wife might look daily upon the distant River Jumna. It was added to and finally completed in the twelfth century, and now consists of five stories, and reaches a height of 238 feet, and the top can be reached if you care to climb three hundred very steep steps.

I went to visit it again because a friend wished to see it. We stood at the base and, looking up, admired the slender grace of this massive structure, and the

splendid inscriptions which adorn the stone-work of the various stories. My companion wished me to go with him to the top, but I firmly declined, having already that day squeezed myself up the many winding stairs of a minaret. He set off alone, but it was not long before I wished heartily that I had accepted his invitation. I wandered amid the ruins, gazed up at the famous Iron Pillar, and waited for my friend to



reappear, and it was then, and without warning, that two American women pounced upon me and demanded in strident tones to be told which of the various buildings was a certain mosque, whose name I have forgotten. They thrust their guide-books at me and I was told to read what they said, and see for myself how confusing they were. Startled and amused, I did as they requested and then became involved in a heated discussion in which I was contradicted every time I opened my mouth.

I was carried to and fro amid the ruins whilst the two women tried to make up their minds, but in the end I was forced to admit that I was as puzzled as they were, and stupidly inquired if it really mattered which building was which. They did not actually say that I was a triple fool, but their manner implied that this was their opinion. With a swish of skirts I was left alone, and a little later I saw them in company with a thin little Indian man who was wearing a worried frown on his damp forehead.

Tucked away behind the huge Jumma Musjid Mosque is a large, rambling building which is an ivory factory and called the Ivory Palace. Carved ivory has always had a strong appeal to me; in its perfection it can be exquisite, resembling moulded and then solidified cream. It can also change its colour in a remarkable manner. I have a small, very old piece, which is now the glorious colour of a ripe horse-chestnut, a shade which I am told can only be obtained from constant handling by human hands. The history of this piece is of interest, although it is Chinese and not Indian. It is a beautifully carved figure of a

recumbent, naked woman, who lies upon her side. In olden days doctors in China were never allowed to examine their female patients, but when a doctor was needed he was sent for. On his producing the ivory female figure a male member of the family pointed out upon it where the supposed trouble lay. From this the doctor made his diagnosis as the figure lay in the palm of his hand.

I visited the ivory factory, but before doing so made up my mind that ten rupees was the limit I would spend. A plump and hopeful salesman took me in hand and I was shown many lovely things, but I stood entranced for several minutes before a rectangular casket which was quite the most beautiful piece of carving I had ever seen. It was intricate and so exquisitely executed as to be unique. I was told that it had taken the best workman the factory possessed ten years to make, and the price was fifteen thousand rupees.

"Are you ever likely to sell it?" I inquired.

"Perhaps to some rajah or an American," replied the salesman. "But I should be sorry to lose it because it makes the heart feel better to look at it. But to sell such things to-day is not easy. You see, sir, it is not old, but quite new."

I nodded understandingly and turned to another box near by which was carved to resemble fine lace. I was tempted by my companion to buy this, or that, but gradually we came lower and lower down the scale of prices until we arrived before the many trays which held masses of cheap articles. I finally bought a paper knife because I wished to be allowed to see over the factory itself.

In several small adjoining rooms the workmen squatted around the walls, each engaged upon some particular brand of work. The older and experienced men were carving whole tusks, or thick slabs of ivory, where a single slip might ruin many months' work. The younger men, and even boys, were fashioning elephants, beads, and other knick-knacks likely to appeal to the poorer type of tourist. One old man was in the process of carving a whole tusk with entwined figures of the gods and their legendary deeds. The work was nearing completion and I asked him how long he had been on it. He told me nearly three years, and that it would still take several more months before it was finished.

I left the building on my way back to the hotel for luncheon, and speculated on how refreshing it was to discover that, in spite of all the restlessness we have instilled into the East, there are still those who find it worth while to produce work calling for infinite patience and superb skill.

The way back to the hotel crossed the Chandi Chowk, which is the main street in Delhi City. To country bumpkins it is what Regent Street is to us, and here, at most times of the day, you may see the family parties gazing with longing eyes into the shops ; staring open-mouthed as the crashing tramcars tear past ; or wandering slowly through the hurrying, pushing crowds. First comes the burly, good-tempered, bearded husband with the toil of the earth written large all over him. At his heels is the small wife, often wearing the full purdah gown, and she carries the youngest child in her arms, whilst one or more elder children toddle beside her skirts. All are



wearing their best clothes, and the children suck sweets, or pieces of cheap fruit.

Coming suddenly out of a side alley on to the crowded pavement I ran into a minor adventure by almost treading upon a small boy, two and a half feet high, who was wearing a gorgeously brocaded cap. A plump babu ran into me as I stopped abruptly, and then cannoned off, and the shin of his left leg caught the youngster in the middle of the back. The babu hurried on, leaving the child flat on his face on the pavement, and the roars of lamentation which arose from this tiny thing astonished me. Bending down I set him on his feet, put his cap straight, and looked up to face an indignant father, to whom I hurriedly explained that it was not I who had done this deed.

"They be sons of shame, those paunchy babu robbers," exclaimed the man, grinning. "If he were here I would drive my fist into his fat stomach."

The man, who was obviously a soldier, picked up his son and handed him to his mother, who caught him in her arms and chided him, whilst he turned his head and regarded me with wide, dark eyes still misty with tears.

"You serve in the Army?" I inquired.

"Aye, sahib. I be a full naik in the Punjabi Regiment. I am on leave from Rawal Pindi and we visit my wife's relations. The sahib is an officer sahib?"

"Yes. I am a major sahib and serve in the Tope Khana, but in Quetta."

The man was as pleased as a child at this news and very politely asked me a number of questions regarding myself. Then, very shyly, he inquired whether I

would honour him by visiting his wife's mother's house which was but a few paces ; in fact, it was in the alley out of which I had just come. After a glance at my watch I said I should be very pleased. Striding by my side the naik led me down the alley, stopping before a rough wooden door in the wall of a large house. Opening it he led the way into a small courtyard in which were the usual aged and discarded charpoy, a few bedraggled plants in pots, and water-jars of various sizes and shapes.

The wife now hurriedly pushed past us, entered a door and went up a flight of wooden stairs, leaving her husband and me to wait in the courtyard until suitable preparations had been made to receive me. A shrill chattering soon arose from a room high up on the inner wall, a shutter was flung back, and the head of a aged dame appeared. This was obviously the mother-in-law, and she regarded us for a moment and then withdrew her head and slammed the shutter.

My host caught my eye and grinned.

"Yes, sahib, it is she, but I have no fear of her. She chatters senselessly like a bander log, and yet she is wise in many things and her heart is good."

"I understand. They are the same with us, the sahibs," I replied, laughing.

At this point someone called shrilly from above and the naik promptly led me to the doorway and so up the stairs. Mounting two short flights I was shown into a large room, simply but well furnished in Indian style. In a corner, beside the window, which had been opened, a large pile of cushions had been hastily flung down on to an old, but good carpet.

The man and I seated ourselves, and from an inner

room came the pattering of agitated feet, whilst others hastened down the stairs. There was also the clicking of many glass bracelets and the clinking of heavy silver anklets. The mother-in-law was busy, and the hurrying feet on the stairs were those of the wife going after fresh supplies.

A great shaft of sunlight entered the window and spilled itself on the floor at our feet ; there was that faint, but very definite, mephitic odour on the air which you come to connect with most Indian houses ; and the teeming life in the bazaars was like the hum from some gigantic top. Pulling out my case I took out a cigarette and lit it, and then offered it to my host. He took one of the cigarettes and I struck a light for him. Smoking it in the Oriental fashion he sat in silence until a few moments later there came the patter of feet and the mother-in-law came into the room carrying a small bowl in which were a few bananas and half a water-melon. Unveiled, she was as thin and scraggy as a half-starved and plucked hen. Above her thin, hooked nose were two small but piercing black eyes, and her grey hair straggled like the writhing serpents of Medusa. She wore a shapeless black dress and was hung about with heavy silver ornaments. Putting down the bowl between us she paid no attention to me, but glared at her son-in-law.

"O shameless one, drinking the foreign smoke," she cried shrilly. "You bring shame to my house. Is it thus they teach you in the Government service ? What if the neighbours see ? My face is blackened."

"Cease, woman. Thy aimless chattering annoys the Major Sahib Bahadur," ordered the naik sternly. "Is this all thy house has to offer to the Heaven-born ?"

The old lady flung up her chin and squawked like an outraged macaw.

"Thinkest thou that I am a bunnia's widow, heavy with riches, that I can buy the bazaars to offer thee? I, in my own house, to be ordered so. Have I not sent my daughter, thy wife, for the sweet waters such as the sahibs drink? Wouldst have me buy half Delhi for thee, good for nothing?"

"Good. Now leave us," said the son-in-law, serenely. "The Major Sahib Bahadur and I will talk on matters beyond thy understanding."

The old lady shuffled out of the room and I could hear her grumbling to herself as she moved to and fro in the inner room.

Invited to take something from the bowl I accepted a banana which I peeled and ate. In the meanwhile the son had come into the room and stood beside his father's shoulder, from where he regarded me with unwinking eyes and a thumb to mouth.

"And what is your honoured name?" I inquired.

The boy buried his face on his father's shoulder.

"O, timid as a mouse, Dost Mahomed. Speak thy name to the major sahib. Surely at times thou roarest like the tiger in the jungle," said the naik, gently lifting his son's head.

"Dost Mahomed," lisped the boy and again hid his head.

"Very good, my son. Now go and take the sahib's hand as the sahibs do and I have taught thee."

The child, pushed towards me, held out his hand, but I laughed and refused to take it.

"It is well done, but I will not take thy hand. When thou art a strong man like thy father, yes.

Then also will I hit thee on the back and say shabash."

I had refused to take the boy's hand in greeting, remembering Kipling's grave warning in that horrid story, *The Return of Imray*. Should this child before me develop a bout of fever, or some such illness, in the near future, I might be accredited with an evil eye, and that is a very unpleasant thing to acquire. It is, therefore, wiser never to touch, or praise, an Indian child, for this reason.

"Is thy father also a soldier?" I asked my host who had now pulled his son down on to the cushions beside him.

"Aye, sahib, he was. A havildar in the Punjabi Regiment, but he died on the hill-tops of the North-West Frontier. His manner of death was a shameful matter."

"Tell me the tale," I suggested.

"It was in a sungar in the Tirah, when many of those sons of swine-like fathers attacked the picket in the hour just before the dawn. My father was the havildar in charge, and with him were six men. They fought like tigers, but one by one they were killed. When the men from the regiment, who had run all the way from the camp, arrived it was too late. The enemy, friends of that evil one, the Fakir of Ipi, took my father's head, but they found clasped tightly in one of his hands much black hair torn from the head of an enemy."

The story was interrupted by the arrival of four bottles of very highly coloured mineral waters, and there followed a fierce altercation with the mother-in-law who was unable to produce suitable receptacles

from which to drink. We were, therefore, forced to drink straight from the bottles, a proceeding I regarded as highly unsafe, but I did manage to give the top of my bottle a good rub with the edge of my coat before putting it to my lips.

My host put down his nearly empty bottle on the floor, and, after a loud and satisfying belch, took up the thread of his story.

"And so my mother became a widow and much honoured in our village. The commissioner sahib himself came to our house and gave my mother the medal of silver which the Government awarded because my father had fought bravely. But there were a few who said evil things, being eaten up with envy.

"My uncle was mullah in our mosque and he desired that I also should become a mullah. But, my mother aiding, I ran far away and became one of my father's regiment where I was well received for his sake. Soon I also shall become a havildar, if Allah wills it so. I heard afterwards that my uncle pulled much hair from his beard, it was ever scanty, and he spoke evilly to my mother, but she has a tongue like a sword and called him a goat who had lost its senses, and drove him from the house."

"That is a good story and doubtless you will become an officer, even the highest," I said.

"If Allah wills."

"What think you of the new order, where we officer sahibs give our places to thy people, even to the colonel sahib?"

"Sahib, it is an evil thing; a madness to do to us who faithfully serve the great King across the sea. Captain Licknan sahib, who is our company com-

mander, is to us our father and our mother. To him we go with trouble, or joy, or sorrow, and he gives us wisdom. Just and straight as the flight of an arrow is he, terrible in wrath, but with the heart of a tiny child, and very wise is he. There is also Spang sahib, who is as a devil unchained, but he is yet young and will grow in wisdom.

“With the sahibs, promotion and favour is by merit alone, with us that is rarely so. Without the sahibs we soldiers are but little children with no one to guide. I say this is true, and so said my father. The aged subadar major sahib bahadur who waits to die in our village grows very wrathful when they speak of these matters in the village council, and the babu sons from the cities craftily colour the water of truth with empty words.” The naik looked worried and broke off for a moment. “But, sahib, we do not speak openly on such matters.”

“I understand and keep my own council. We have a saying by a great writer which runs: ‘They twist words to make a trap for fools.’ There is another and older saying: ‘Speech is silver, but silence is golden,’ ” I said.

“Both are excellent and wise,” said my host gravely.

I then arose and went away, being already late for luncheon. This was the second time within a month that an Indian has said what he thought to me, and I was flattered.

The weather had been glorious, with cool nights, and blazing, but not hot, sunshine, all day and every day. In the hotel grounds were charming gardens and a fine swimming bath, on whose edge I was in the

habit of sitting with my pre-luncheon drink. The time had now arrived for me to be moving on, but where should I go? To Benares, Calcutta, and the hills of Assam; or Baroda and Indore; or into the far south to Mysore and Ootacamund, and perhaps across to Ceylon? Each route had its appeal, but that of the south won, mainly because comparatively few tourists visit it.

On the eve of departure after tea I walked up to the famous Ridge and eventually came upon the old Viceregal Lodge which is now a college. Standing in spacious grounds it closely resembles a huge Dak bungalow and it is astonishing how any entertaining was ever carried on with such poor accommodation. On the return journey I took a short cut which led from an upper road to a lower one, and sloped steeply downwards through thick, low scrub, and over loose stones and boulders. When about half-way to the bottom I suddenly came face to face with a massive, dark blue, and hairy water-buffalo. What he was doing in such a place I could not imagine, but there he was, and he instantly showed the keenest dislike of my presence. He first raised his vast head and blew at me, and then putting forward his ears he lowered his horns and took several quick steps in my direction. Water-buffaloes have never cared for me and this one was plainly filled with loathing.

Without waiting for further demonstrations I leapt sideways and went down the slope like a mountain goat, in quite surprising bounds. It was fortunate that I arrived at the bottom with only torn trousers and scratched legs, when I might easily have sprained an ankle, or broken a leg. During the flight I could hear



the beast blundering about in my wake, but he soon gave it up. I was acutely aware of my condition and slunk into the hotel by means of a back entrance, and hastened to my room to change.

My bearer, when told of the occurrence, smiled.

“Why did the sahib not hit him hard upon his nose with his stick, as we do? They run away very fast.”

I returned a non-committal answer.

## CHAPTER VI

I DREADED the eight-hundred-mile journey to Hyderabad Deccan, because long train journeys in India can be more boring and tiresome than in almost any other country in the world. The scenery is uniformly monotonous, and the only relief is when you draw up at some junction, or station, and are able to watch the surging crowds. But even these have a remarkable sameness after you have looked at them a dozen times in a day and in blazing sunlight.

I arrived in Hyderabad in the early morning, after an uneventful journey. The best hotel was a curious affair, which, although much dilapidated, was yet clean and comfortable in an old-fashioned manner. There was no doubt whatsoever that I was once again in the tropics, the atmosphere having changed in that subtle manner which travellers come to recognize, but find so difficult to put into words. It does not entirely consist in a mere increase in heat and dampness, but there is an air of languorousness overhanging everything, and a sparkle seems to have died out of life in general. Mentally I find this stimulating, but physically it soon has a weakening effect upon me, causing me to walk less briskly and to laze about in chairs, instead of being up and doing. Many other people do, of course, experience a similar sensation, but generally without the mental exaltation.

The state of Hyderabad is the largest in India and

the Nizam is said to be the richest man in the world. Actually no one, not even he himself, knows the real extent of his wealth, but there is no doubt that it is fabulous. In many of the ruling houses in India there is an unwritten law that, for the family honour, a prince at his death must leave the private treasury richer than when he first took it over. This is excellent in moderation, but it can be carried too far, as in the case of the Nizam who is, to put it mildly, careful.

Knowing this idiosyncrasy I did not expect to find Hyderabad a splendid city, or the palace built of gleaming white marble, and I was correct. Hiring a car to take me on a round of the principal sights we made for the palace first of all. Little could be seen of it because it was surrounded by a high wall in a state of poor repair, and the main entrance at first horrified and then amused me. It is a large, simple gateway, and hiding all but a tiny portion was a vast blind which looked as if it were made of odd pieces of sacking hastily sewn together. It was raised and lowered by means of strong cords. On either side of this blind, shoddy, ill-disciplined soldiers lounged about and gossiped with policemen only a little better than themselves. They eyed me with grim dislike.

The only sights of interest in the city were the huge, solitary, but very fine gateway built astride the main street, and the tombs of past Nizams. The place of the tombs is a long, open-sided pavilion of white marble, and is of delightful simplicity, where the tombs are merely slabs raised a few inches from the gleaming floor.

Soon tiring of the dusty glare of the uninteresting streets, which have neither the charm and romance of

the old, nor the dignity of the modern, I demanded to be taken to the Zoo. This is an interesting one and I have never seen before so many weird and distorted birds as were here, a few of which might easily have come out of a nightmare.

Visitors were permitted to approach the actual bars of cages containing large and fine tigers and leopards. In the last den of a line an unusually large tiger was



thoroughly enjoying a big lump of bloody flesh beside the front bars of his cage. I stood not a foot away from him and watched, fascinated. Eyeing me once or twice he continued his chewing apparently unconcerned at my nearness: then, without warning, he leapt suddenly to his feet, opened his blood-stained mouth full in my face, and roared hideously at me. I stood rooted to the spot, in deafened and stunned surprise,

and then leapt backwards with agility and promptly tripped over a low railing. There followed another roar, of amused delight, from a small crowd of onlookers who had been waiting for something of this kind to happen. Much shaken, I recovered my topee and sunglasses, and tried to carry off my loss of dignity with unconcern, but, sickened by the blast of foul breath, I was not successful. I think that tiger had a sense of humour and probably chuckled at my discomfiture.

In the evening a man dealing in tobacco, who was staying in the hotel, kindly took me in his car to the cantonment area of Secunderabad, which lies some distance away to the north-east. Here we found a beautiful, well-laid-out cantonment, full of charming bungalows, good roads, fine trees, and gardens ablaze with flowers. After a visit to the large and fine club I wished it had been my good fortune to have served in this station; we were told, however, that in summer it was very hot and the mosquitoes tiresome and hungry.

There being no further reason for lingering in Hyderabad I left the following morning for Mysore, about which I had heard a great deal.

The country-side was now utterly different to that in the north, and a strange mixture of intense cultivation and many low, barren hills piled high with vast groups of huge, rounded boulders, looking as if the children of giants had been using them as playthings.

The journey was not uneventful, because in the next compartment was a stout foreigner with a club foot. Amiable, he talked unceasingly, and was as devastating a bore as any found in a ship, and he stalked me,

coming into my compartment whenever he was able. I escaped to the restaurant car, and fled on to the platform, but with little success. It was at Guntakal Junction, during one of these attempts at evading the foreigner, that I ran into a European police sergeant who was in charge of a large gang of convicts. He was pathetically glad to talk to another strange white man, having lived alone in some desolate spot in the district for thirteen years.

"Haven't you been on leave?" I inquired.

"No, sir. You don't seem to want it after a time."

"Well, you look remarkably fit. I should have died of drink, or boredom, long ago," I remarked. "How do you amuse yourself?"

The man grinned cheerfully.

"Oh, I dunno. I do a bit of gardening, and there is always plenty of shooting, you know. Geese in thousands just now. I got ten with one shot only a short time ago."

"Ten with one cartridge?" I exclaimed, amazed.

"What sort of bore was it?"

"Just an ordinary twelve bore, sir. And it is true, I assure you."

"Well, you astonish me. But tell me, what sort of country is it about here?"

"Poor, very poor, sir, and so hot in summer that you can't even think. The natives are a weak-kneed lot, but I get along with them pretty well. I'll be going home in a year or two now, I expect. But there's my train."

He gathered up his handcuffed flock and departed with a cheery wave of his hand, leaving me to stand on that hot platform and marvel. It is with such men

that we rule our Empire, and cause foreigners to rage and fume. This man was probably the son of an artisan, a small shopkeeper, or a market gardener, and yet he could handle men and keep himself in control, and fit, for years on end in a moist, deadening heat and dreary solitude. And that, when you consider it, is something to wonder at.

When nearing Bangalore I was walking up and down a platform when a local train drew in, and I was considerably surprised to see several blonde European girls, travelling in the lowest class of carriage and mixing with all kinds of rabble. At first I thought they must be members of a stranded theatrical company who were struggling to reach some port. It even crossed my mind to go over and ask if I could be of any assistance. Fortunately, however, I asked the club-footed man concerning them.

“Vat those?” he said scornfully. “They Bangalore girls are. Many in Bangalore. Why I do not know, but they are pure natives.”

I shuddered at the thought of how near I had come to making a complete ass of myself.

The railway to Mysore city stops at the most well-known of all the battle-fields in India. This is Seringapatam, where Tippu Sultan, known as the Tiger of Mysore, gave us so much trouble during our early days in India. Tippu Sultan was the son of an adventurer who had turned the reigning house of Mysore off its throne and taken it himself, and Tippu hated us with a fanatical fervour.

Seringapatam is an island in the Cauvery River, and here the Tiger built a stronghold within a stronghold. In the year 1799 we besieged this fortress for

fourteen days and it seemed as if the place really were impregnable, but, in the end, we captured it by an attack staged at an unorthodox hour. During the heat of the middle day both sides had been in the habit of calling off the fight, and retiring to the shade and the midday meal: General Baird, at one o'clock in the afternoon of 5 May 1799, led a charge which is known as 'The Forlorn Hope': with splendid bravery he led his men up a steep bank, burst into the stronghold, and completely surprised the Tiger. A fierce fight took place, but Tippu, an undoubtedly brave and resourceful man, died sword in hand at the Water Gate and was buried in the ruins of his fort.

The train halted for some time at one end of the island and I left to have a look at this famous spot. The entrenchments, ramparts, and double ditches, are now hardly visible, but the Tiger's mausoleum and parts of the Dowlat Palace are still well preserved. Walking over grass-covered mounds, past ruined walls, and down an avenue of cypress trees and palms, under the hot morning sun, the silence was uncanny. This is an island of ghosts, where the blood-soaked earth offered up its past in waves like those of hot air off desert sand.

There were the dungeons in which large numbers of our men were imprisoned by Tippu, and I could visualize their piteous condition in the hot, moist, fetid atmosphere of those dark caverns, and also their ever-present fears of a lingering death. A monument marks the spot where General Baird stood on the bank waving his sword and encouraging his men to make that glorious 'Forlorn Hope.' In the palace there still lingers, like an odour, the sensuousness, danger,



and stuffiness of the Court ; and, lastly, there is the tomb where the Tiger lies buried, and above it a tablet which says : ' The Light of Islam and the faith has left this world.'

I was glad to start back towards the station, being depressed by a fog of malignancy which hung like a pall above this fortress. After so many years did the hatred of Tippu Sultan still linger here to disturb my spirit ? Perhaps. A snake slithered across my path, and vanished in some thick undergrowth, and I shivered.

From the moment I stepped into a waiting motor car outside the station at Mysore I knew I was going to like this state, which was to be so different to the one I had left. The hotel was a large and pleasant one situated on rising ground outside the city, and from the veranda before my bedroom was a delightful view across the tree-covered spaces. After a bath and some good coffee I set out on foot for my first look at the city.

Down a tree-lined broad road I came to the first street, with its clean little houses and shops, where there was a neat, trim people who smiled ; the little girls wore flowers in their short pigtails, and trotting bullocks passed as I glanced into the shops. At the bottom of this street was the covered market crowded with shoppers, who pressed between the stalls piled high with many handsome fruits, grains, and vegetables, where smiling salesmen pressed me to buy their wares.

Once again in the open I found myself in the middle of the bazaar, which was an extensive open space from which roads radiated in all directions. What a colourful and fascinating spot this was, with its crowds of brightly

clad people, busy shops, and fountain on whose rim sat many picturesque figures. The sound of active life came to my ears like the hum of a gigantic top.

Surprise, which had been growing upon me since I entered this state, now deepened considerably, and it left me astounded. Although it was nearly noon and hot, and I was surrounded by teeming multitudes, there were no smells, dust, or flies, and the streets were cleaner than those in London at a similar hour. It was fantastic, but the longer I remained in Mysore the more I came to realize that this was the brightest and cleanest Eastern city I knew.

Crossing the open space, dodging cyclists and horse vehicles, I turned half-right and came out into what was the government and business area of the city, with the walls of the palace grounds to one side. It is no exaggeration to say that the whole of this large area is one great garden, ablaze with flowers and deep green trees. Avenues spread everywhere, and abroad is an air of brightness, cheerfulness, and contented prosperity.

Charmed and delighted I strolled down the broadest of the avenues, and came to a great fountain which stood in the centre of a roundabout, whose edges were large beds in which were massed the finest cannias I have ever seen. Deep crimsons, glorious pinks, and sunshine yellows, glowed like rare jewels, and behind them was the velvet grass of open spaces. Great jets from the fountain soared upwards to cool the air and fall in tinkling cascades. Tired, or aged, people of Mysore sat on the seats at this spot just as they would do in London. I particularly noticed one old dame who held a beautiful shawl over her almost bald

head as she huddled against one end of a seat. She appeared fascinated by a bed of scarlet cannias near at hand, and her fallen mouth moved in and out causing the already deep wrinkles of her face to deepen still further. Was it emotion which caused this working of the lips, or merely old age? She glanced up at me with faded, wise eyes and returned to her meditations.

Passing on, skirting the fountain and continuing down the avenue, which now sloped slightly upwards, I forced myself to realize that I was in a south Indian city and not the grounds of some Royal palace in Europe. Gardeners were busy sweeping, garnishing, and tending their charges when I arrived at large but scattered buildings which I learned were the Royal stables. I smiled, thinking of our own in London which faced the noisy, petrol-vapour-filled street.

The long walk under a hot sun made me sleepy, and after luncheon in the large, airy dining-room of the hotel I dozed on my bed until Mullu Ram brought the afternoon tea and set it on a table on the veranda. Refreshed by the rest I went out and sat down beside the tea and admired the view. Directly to the front, and on the far side of the city, was the magnificent state guest house, looking like a palace on its own, and to the right was the famous Chamundi Hill, shimmering in the afternoon haze.

I have said before in this book that Indian states are mirrors of their rulers, and this was no exception. I knew nothing of the Maharajah, but it was obvious that he must be a man of considerable culture and ability, and filled with an urge to help his people, and to modernize his domain. There was a copious

supply of water from vast reservoirs, and unlimited electric power, and sanitation was apparently carefully studied. All this combining of the most modern usages from Europe had been done without spoiling the Eastern atmosphere.

My musings were interrupted by the appearance of a young German and his formidable mother upon the veranda, and instantly a commotion arose, because it seemed that the youth had left his room and slammed the door, leaving his key inside. This did not appear to be a serious matter, but before the door was opened, the hotel manager, the hotel clerk, several hotel bearers, and myself, were dragged into the affair. The German vanished into his room leaving his mother sitting in a chair from where she regarded me balefully, and I grinned thinking how much she resembled several dowagers I knew at home. The youth came out of his room again and was about to say something to me when he caught his mother's eyes, wilted, and returned to his room.

It was now much cooler and I decided to go for another walk. Leaving the hotel I turned sharply to the right and went up a broad, neat road, where, on the left, was a huge palace-like building which was a college, and on the right several large houses standing in pleasant grounds. The road led to an open stretch of turf country which would have made a first-class golf course. Crossing it I came to a large reservoir, on whose high banks were paths, flower-beds, and trees. It was a pleasant spot and I lingered, watching flocks of large and small birds taking their evening baths in a few shallow runnels from an overflow. It was an interesting sight because the bathing space was limited

and each bird had to wait his turn. If one or more bathers dallied unduly those waiting either shouted angrily at them, or jumped in and hustled them out, and this caused more than one fight in which beaks were used quite savagely. After each bather had emerged there was a great display of feather shaking, preening, and flapping of wet wings. Each bird chattered eagerly of the events of an exciting day, but no one listened.

At the far end of the reservoir I climbed down the steep bank towards a deep watercourse filled with a dark, yellow, stagnant water which was spanned by a small bridge. When crossing the bridge I leaned over the edge and watched several water buffaloes wallowing in great contentment in the cooling water. It was now time, however, for the beasts to go homewards, and a boy, armed with a long stick, was trying to get them to come up out of the water. They refused to obey and moved out into deeper water forcing the youth to wade after them, whilst he cursed fluently and whacked their backs severely with his stick. Two little girls sat on the bank and shouted advice, as slowly and reluctantly the beasts, one by one, climbed out of the water, their blue-black skins shining and daubed with mud.

This rural scene reminded me forcefully of how thousands of similar ones must have been taking place all over India at this time. The toil of the long, hot day was nearly over, sundown approached, and a tired peacefulness was enshrouding all Nature.

It was time that I also went home, and crossing the bridge I walked over a piece of ground liberally strewn with high, discarded ant hills, most of which had

small round holes in their bases. Wondering what could have made them, I poked my walking-stick into several, thereby provoking the most active dis-



pleasure from a nearby ancient man who shouted at me and waved his arms threateningly. This annoyed me until I realized I was being extremely stupid and the man was merely warning me that these holes were

made by snakes, and the residents might be at home and upset at my behaviour.

The following morning I set out to obtain, from one of the government buildings, a permit to see over the palace. Skirting the palace walls, with the charming flower-beds at their base, I came to the government buildings and was guided to the proper department. I was first of all 'looked over' by a minor official and then ushered into the Maharajah's private secretary's office where I was again summed-up, politely, but quite obviously. The permit was then issued and I left the office feeling that, perhaps after all, I was a person of some consequence.

The palace stands in spacious grounds, but, when seen from the splendid main gateway, it distinctly shocks the more sensitive visitor. Having seen the city I prepared myself for something resembling the Taj Mahal, or the new buildings at Delhi, but the truth is, this palace resembles a mixture of a gigantic pier pavilion and the Eastern buildings at Brighton. When lighted up at night by thousands and thousands of tiny, coloured electric bulbs the likeness is intensified.

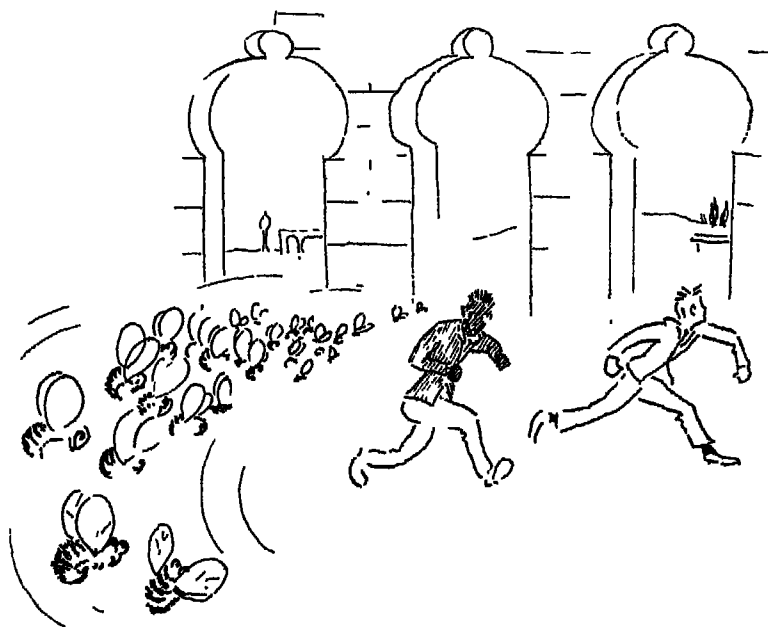
It was some time before I found the right door, but when I did so I was taken in hand by a dapper little Court official. I was shown the massive and heavily ornamented silver doors, others inlaid with ivory, and splendidly carved pillars, but, apart from these, the interior decorations were very crude to my Western eyes. The throne room was especially alarming, where the fat pillars and the ceiling had been painted by a person who owned a very lively sense of violent colourings. In all fairness I must state that I saw this

apartment when it was empty ; I can imagine that when filled with the Court in full dress this form of decoration might not appear so inharmonious.

Most of the front of the palace consists of a vast gallery lined with many seats and overlooking an open space in the grounds. It is from this spot that the Maharajah reviews his troops and holds his durbars.

My guide spoke excellent English, and poured out a stream of information as we toured the various rooms and galleries. It was when nearing the end of my visit that disaster nearly overtook us. A door on the ground floor opened into a small courtyard and we went through it to find ourselves in the middle of a large and active swarm of bees.

"Oh, my dear goodness. Let us flee from here





quickly," exclaimed the official, waving his arms frantically, whilst the bees buzzed. "You follow me with plenty of haste."

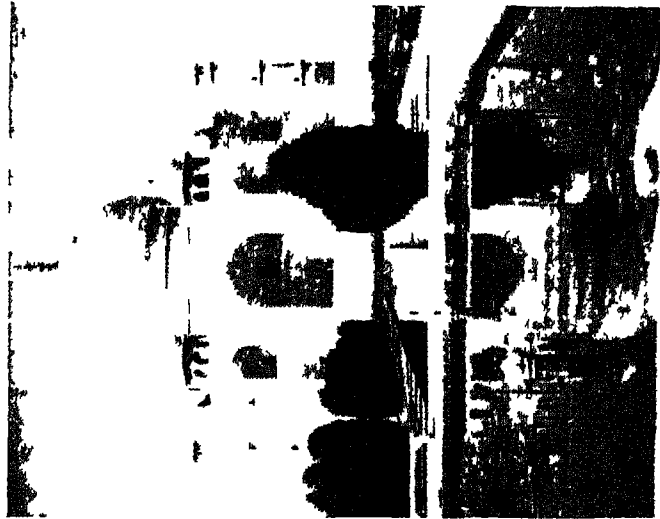
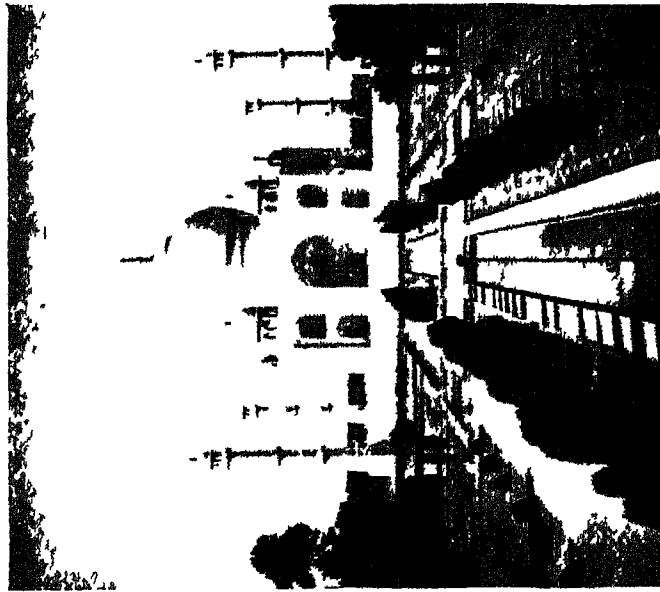
Grinning, I did so, and we tore down the veranda and through the door leading into the casket room; this door was slammed, leaving the bees to wonder what all the fuss was about.

There were many tables in the casket room and on them were displayed scores of silver boxes, cylinders, and other presentation gifts, but they were uncleaned, uninspiring, and they bored me, although they were regarded with much veneration by my companion.

We remained in this room far longer than was necessary, and at last, in desperation, I myself opened the door leading to the courtyard, whilst the official hovered nervously in the rear. The bees were still there, but the main body had moved farther away, leaving only a few active rear guards. We faced them, and ran for safety, much to the amusement of palace servants who watched from well out of range of the insects.

During the tour I had been worried by the uncertainty as to whether I should, or should not, tip this official. I was still undecided and about to take my leave when he was called away. Relieved, I walked out into the grounds and had just left them when I heard agitated footsteps behind me. It was my guide and I knew why I had been followed. I produced a tip and we parted with smiles.

One of the sights of Mysore which 'must be done' is to ascend Chamundi Hill at sunset time. This hill is a long ridge rising steeply from the comparatively



THESE TWO VIEWS OF THE TAJ MAHAL SHOW CLEARLY HOW THE TREES SPOIL THE  
DISTANT VIEW OF THE BUILDING



level country-side, two miles from the city, and it is 3500 above sea-level. A large touring car arrived, I took my place beside the driver, and we set off at the usual swift pace. I soon became aware that the driver was afflicted by a loud sniff, one of those maddening kind which set your nerves on edge by its devastating persistency.

We sniffed our way across the city, past the fine race-course, and began the gradual climb to the top of Chamundi. Half-way to the top, and when rounding a sharp bend, we came upon a herd of cows. The driver slowed down and sounded his horn, which, on this occasion, uttered a shriek not unlike that of a tail-nipped hyena. The cows, startled by our sudden appearance, and outraged by such frightful sounds, lifted their tails and fled. A few actually bounded down the rock-strewn hill-side, a feat which amused and interested me, because I have always regarded the cow as an ungainly creature where movement is concerned, although once in Austria I did see a matronly one leap a four-barred gate.

Shortly after this we came upon another kind of beast ; it was, in fact, Nandi, the famous bull of Shiva, and it is a colossal figure, sixteen feet high, carved out of a single boulder about two hundred and fifty years ago. A short roadway leads up to the platform on which the bull sits with its head towards the side of the hill. It is black with massive neck and shoulders on which are carved garlands and trappings. The figure is humorous, being fat and self-satisfied, and not unlike a paunchy plutocrat taking his ease after a heavy meal. The people of Mysore being Hindus bring offerings of flowers which they place between the hooves.

The driver insisted that I should get and look at the bull, and he came with me to act as a guide.

"Pretty fine, mister. (*Sniff.*) Many misters come to see it. (*Sniff.*) All one damn big stone. (*Sniff.*) You like him?" (*Two sniffs.*)

"Yes, I think he is fine," I replied, as we stood gazing up at the vast head.

It was then that a thin, aged, rather dirty priest-custodian came out of the black interior of a small temple, which stood to one side. He held out a claw, I made an offering, and we returned to the car in a flurry of approving sniffs, and went on to the top of the hill.

The sun was low when we arrived, and sitting on a low, warm wall I looked down upon the country-side as if from an aeroplane. To the right and in the middle distance was the city, but to the front, and far round to the left was the fertile, open country, all golden, and russet, and bathed in sleepy peacefulness. Tiny figures were moving towards the dark trees where the villages lay; ponds and streams had become molten gold; purple shadows leapt across the land like ballet dancers; and the distant Ghats were tyrian against a flaxen sky. The sky really was flaxen at this point, but it gradually deepened to saffron, orange, and, finally, flame, as it neared the sun, a blood-red ball sinking visibly.

The driver stood near by as I watched this glorious, ever-changing picture, but his sniffing broke the calm and I told him to go away.

The sun was gone and I turned towards the city, now veiled by a faint mist. One by one the streets were illuminated, the palace burst into a hundred

thousand points of varied colours, and a myriad other lights turned the whole area into a complicated, scintillating piece of jewellery. An astoundingly lovely spectacle; and I was so enraptured, that when I glanced at my watch I saw I had been watching for over an hour and a half. I have seen many other beautiful places in the gloaming; Hong Kong from the Nine Dragon Hills, Ankara from the hills, and New York from the top of the Empire State Building, but none could match Mysore for sheer beauty at this time.

Regretfully I tore myself away, and returned to the city, where we came upon one final and charming sight. The fountain on the avenue, of which I have already spoken, was now lighted up from the inside, and the colour rapidly changed from red to blue, blue to green, and then to white. Normally I do not care for such form of illumination, smacking as it often does of garish vulgarity, but this fountain was a class on its own.

In the days that followed I went to the charming zoo with its fine giraffes, and the lions and tigers who roam about as they do at Whipsnade, and I wandered about the bazaars, visiting the silversmiths, and shops where they sold the pungent sandalwood oil and heavily-scented local soap. But the time to move on once again approached and I made inquiries as to how to reach Ootacamund, the 7500-foot-high hill-station in the Ghats.

The sallow, sleek, young man from Madras who presided over the reception counter in the hotel smiled blandly.

“To hire a car to take you to Ootacamund will cost

one hundred and four rupees, sir. But if you go by the mail bus it will cost but twenty."

"But what kind of bus is it?" I inquired, remembering the one which had taken me to Bundi.

"It is a fine bus and you will be most comfortable, sir. I will get you a front seat."

"All right. I will go by it to-morrow morning."

## CHAPTER VII

**A**T eight o'clock the following morning it was distinctly chilly as I stood on the veranda of the hotel, awaiting the mail bus which was to take me on the ninety-mile drive to Ootacamund. It was fifteen minutes late, but when it did appear it was better than I had expected it would be. The size of a large baker's van, there was a wooden roof, the sides were open, and it was tightly packed with an assortment of passengers who sat on four seats facing the driver. They regarded me, the bearer, and the luggage, with polite, but deep interest.

The driver got out and assisted the bearer with the luggage, but very soon a noisy scene developed because my bearer declared, at the top of his voice, that the driver was not securely stowing away the various pieces of baggage on the roof. Exasperated, the bearer clambered up the side of the bus, swept aside the driver, and did the work himself. When all was as it should have been and I was about to take the six inches of seat allotted to me in the front of the bus, it was found that there was no room at the back for the bearer. Promptly the driver, the reception-clerk from the hotel who had come out to watch, and the passengers, raged together, whilst I looked on as an amused spectator. The matter was finally settled by the driver going to the back of his vehicle, clambering up the side and severely thumping a large, black-



bearded and inoffensive peasant. The man grinned good-humouredly and squeezed himself tightly against a pert young woman who was wearing a gold nose rose, ear-rings, and a brightly coloured shawl.

"Am I a nautch girl to be treated so?" she cried shrilly. "Remove thy pig-like thighs."

"Hold thy peace, woman," said the driver severely. "The sahib's servant must sit."

"Aye, in the old days thou wouldst have sat on the roof, chit," added another passenger to the girl. "Be still and thankful."

A space of about three inches was now free and the bearer scrambled inside. The driver, still rumbling to himself, flung in the gears, let in the clutch with a jerk, and the journey had begun. Beside me was a small Indian with a straight nose, well-trimmed moustaches, and amiable brown eyes. On the seat directly behind were two plump Hindus, both bankers, one with a wife, and on the far side of them was a tall, thin man with fierce black eyes who was wearing a canary-coloured shawl, and was a follower of Shiva, as the caste mark on his forehead clearly showed.

On the main road we proceeded in what I knew was the wrong direction, but it appeared that we were to pick up mails before leaving the city. At a post office the mail was produced, and I wondered where it was to be put, because the roof already resembled a haystack; but it was loaded. Then a number of people ardently, passionately, desired to travel as passengers. Mildly at first, but with rapidly increasing violence, the driver denied them. He ended up with gross personalities.

"Get thy elephant-like body from our path so that

we may proceed," he shouted to a petulant man with a drooping paunch who was leaning across the radiator. "Eat less and doubtless thou couldst walk, and thy mother would know thee again."

The fat one, wobbling with fury, came around and shook a fist in the driver's face.

"Thy grandmother was a female hyena," he screamed. "Let me aboard, devil's spawn, or I will have thee flung out to starve in the bazaar."

Many of us laughed, and wondered what the driver



would do. Not in the least upset he let in the gears, and then, with his right foot, he pushed the man heavily in the chest as the vehicle shot forward. Staggering ludicrously backwards the would-be passenger all but fell upon an infant, who had he done so, would have been flattened on the roadway. In such a manner did this unusual journey begin.

At a spanking pace we left the city on a good road lined with gardens, farms, and houses. My companion became talkative, deploring the extreme chilliness of the morning, and telling how he was a maker of soap who was visiting a brother living in the foothills. Polite inquiries were then made regarding myself, and I was aware that everyone within earshot listened with absorbed interest.

The first ten miles were of no particular interest, but as soon as we entered the thick jungle, with its rolling hills, deep ravines, and rushing watercourses, many people did their best to see that I was kept well informed on the nature of things we were passing. Here tigers and elephants were often seen ; that was a special kind of tree ; this was where the Maharajah came to shoot. Any question on my part produced a babel, especially from the bankers who disagreed violently over one piece of information. This drew in the soap maker, the driver, and the banker's wife. The vehicle swerved frightfully, because the driver would turn his head to scream his views at the bankers. The argument rapidly grew acrimonious, but was instantly forgotten when we nearly ran over a ' Jay Walker ' in the form of an infant monkey whose mother at the roadside chattered angrily as we passed over her child. The bus was halted on my orders and I was

glad to see the baby scuttle out unharmed from between the back wheels. Mother caught it by its absurd stump of a tail and carried it up into a tree from where she made awful faces at us.

Shortly after this we stopped in a village at what corresponded to a road house at home. Everyone got down, and the soap maker insisted that I must accompany him into the house to take coffee. He would accept no refusal.

"I myself will see to the making of the coffee," he said, leading the way into a room full of small tables and chairs. "They do not always boil the water here, and that is dangerous."

Standing near the door I watched the room gradually fill up with a fascinating assortment of people from other buses, all of whom clamoured for food and drink. Mixed with them were idlers from the village, unclean brats, and stray dogs. The air became thick with strong tobacco smoke, the odour of stale coffee, and the rank smell of unwashed body. Everyone was friendly, but it was obvious that sahibs were not in the habit of using this place, and deep interest was taken in my presence.

Triumphantly the soap maker brought a glass of black liquid. It was very hot, awful to taste, but I forced myself to swallow it.

Since the journey had begun the dark eyes of the follower of Shiva were constantly fixed on my own whenever I had turned my head. This man sat, and glared, and said nothing. In the room he faced me, seated alone at a table, and the look in his eyes, still fixed on mine, made me shiver: they were so black and fierce, and behind them was the brain of a fanatic.

What was he thinking about ? Something thoroughly unpleasant regarding myself I was sure. The thought of being at the mercy of such a person was material for an alarming nightmare.

The atmosphere of the room, in the growing heat of the day, became unbearable, and so I went out into the sunshine, after profuse thanks for what I lyingly described as an exquisite drink. The soap maker, however, followed me and begged that I accept an unhusked coco-nut offered to us by a long, thin person in a loin-cloth and filthy pugaree. I protested inability to accept further hospitality and explained that coco-nut milk often made me feel sick.

“ Ah, but not these from my own country. They are as mother’s milk. You shall see.”

The vendor was ordered to open a selected nut and this he prepared to do by squatting down on his haunches and taking the nut between his toes. Using a short chopper he hacked off the thick fibre in a few moments, and so bared the nut. This was inspected, shaken, and returned as unsuitable. Five nuts in all were uncovered before the soap maker was satisfied. I accepted the gift saying that I would eat it when I arrived at Ootacamund, but I lost that nut. Perhaps the Shiva man stole it ; anyway it was not with me when I reached my destination.

The next excitement was when we arrived at the frontier between Mysore and British India where a change of buses had to be made. On the slope of a hill, it was a sylvan glade with tall trees, vivid patches of grass, a picturesque rest house and frontier post, as well as a small stream which cascaded over monstrous boulders.

I wandered about and even went into the jungle, which pressed close on all sides, but I could not shake off the Shiva man. Whenever I turned there were those strange eyes fixed on me. In desperation I conversed with the soap man, and the bankers, and we discussed with engaging frankness the shortcomings of our rule in British India. I grinned, wishing the Secretary of State for India, in his comfortable room in Whitehall, could have heard us.

The Ootacamund bus arrived with a flourish and all was confusion. Those waiting desired to embark before those arriving had emerged ; baggage was sought for, children yelled, and luggage of all kinds was grossly mishandled by everyone who could lay hands on a piece not his own. My own possessions, however, were treated gently, many people assisting in storing them securely on the roof of the new bus.

The second half of the journey now began, and we parted from the old bus and its fresh occupants with many expressions of goodwill. We had not gone more than a few yards, however, when my bearer from the back seat let out a howl like that of a hungry wolf. The brakes were applied with disconcerting suddenness, and it was learned that my helmet-case had been left standing at the roadside.

Gradually we worked our way up through the foothills, and came to the main mass of the Ghats where the 7300-foot climb began. Up and up we thrust with the jungle becoming less dense and the views more delightful with every mile. The bus stopped for a long halt in a large village, where the soap maker left us, and I now had a foot of seat instead of six inches.

I got down and wandered up and down the untidy

main street lined with tiny shops which sold the simple needs of the people. Strange and unsmiling were these semi-hill folk whose village clung to the hill-side ; I could not even force a smile from any of the naked brats who strewed my path, and I tried quite hard. One was busily engaged in tweeking the tail of a ginger cat. I released the yowling beast, and the infant called me a very rude name indeed before he ran off to his home. Even the fowls fled before me with derisive squawks.

From this village onwards we passed through the tea gardens, with their small, compact, dark green bushes, planted neatly in rows which sprawled across the swelling hill-sides. Then came vast, overhanging masses of cliff, waterfalls, and distant views of the yellow, shimmering plains. Up and up we toiled until I began to wonder if we should ever reach the highest point. Then, with startling suddenness, we left the mountain-side, and started to cross open, rolling moorlands exactly like those in the border country of Scotland, even to the streams and clumps of trees.

By the time we reached Ootacamund few of the original passengers remained, and I finally left the bus at the railway station where an expensive taxi took me to a boarding house. Hidden away among high trees on the slopes of an exceedingly steep hill-side, the house was of the bungalow type, pleasant and homely. Madam, an Englishwoman, was pleased to see me, and showed me an excellent room rated at six rupees a day, inclusive of meals.

I was then shown round the establishment, which resembled a large, comfortable bungalow ; the garden, however, was cause for despair at this time. During the previous night there had been eight degrees of

frost which had devastated the finest flower-beds, a fact which almost brought tears to madam's eyes. I was then told of roof troubles caused by crows, who collected large bones which they hid beneath the tiles, thereby forcing them up and allowing the rain to get under them. I was shown a large pile which had been found during recent repairs.

After dinner I went out into a distinctly chilly starlit night where the air was like that of a late October evening at home, but in my room was a blazing log fire and a delicious smell of fragrant wood smoke. In a deep arm-chair before the fire I snuggled down with a sigh of content, and let my thoughts drift back to England and that home I was to seek out early in the coming year. One thing it must have, and that was large, open fire-places, which would burn wood.

My dreams were suddenly shattered by a series of truly frightful cries, which came from outside, and near one of the windows. They were so awful that I shivered, being reminded of the moaning of a stage ghost, an active banshee, and the shrieks of a badly bitten ape. I rushed outside to investigate, and a huge shape like that of a nightmare vampire flapped slowly away into the tops of near-by trees. Why this night bird should have chosen my window ledge on which to sing his love songs I do not know, but he did not return.

Going back into my room I started to do some more unpacking before going to bed, and at once came upon disaster. Owing to the high altitude every bottle that could do so, had leaked. There are few things quite so exasperating as this, the bottles in question



invariably having snuggled up against some prized and expensive garment.

The following day I set out on a tour of the station and found that Ootacamund is different from most of the better-known hill-stations in that it is not situated on a hill-side overlooking the distant plains. The cantonment area is a series of levels, on both sides of a valley, where the roads rise and fall with disconcerting suddenness, and individual bungalows, hidden in the trees, are not easy to find.

The area is not particularly interesting, or pretty, and it is not until you come out on to the golf course, some distance away, that fine views and open country are found. The view from the veranda of the club house is one of the most surprising in India because it is not Indian but English. The open, rolling, brown and green moorlands are studded with clumps of trees, and streams with nut-brown beds cascade down the hill-sides. The air is fresh and invigorating, and above is the pale cobalt sky in which float chubby clouds. It is difficult to realize that you are not in England, but actually eight thousand feet up in the air.

The club is typical of its kind, where there are the serious golfers who talk of little else but medal rounds and handicaps; elderly members who are senile and boring; the typical club secretary who is either praised or bitterly condemned; a few gay young women and bitter-tongued matrons; but mainly there are those who are pleasantly amiable, and full of appreciation of their delightful surroundings.

One morning on the golf course I met two officers from a regiment stationed in Wellington, which lies lower down on the southern side of the Ghats. The

result of this meeting was that another man and myself were invited to visit the station to witness regimental sports and afterwards to dine in the mess.

We set off after luncheon in a battered car, driven with abandon by my companion, down a very steep and winding mountain road. Wellington turned out to be a small and uninteresting cantonment, where on a football field we found the sports already in progress. I have spoken elsewhere of regimental sports, and cannot do so again, except to say that these sports differed from the usual brand, being even more than usually boring, whilst the tea was smoky and the food primitive.

After the affliction was over the officers and ourselves adjourned to the very pleasant little club where we sat round the bar, drank many chota pegs, and told stories. My visits to Indian states brought forth from one man a true and very curious yarn about Sind, which had taken place not many months previously.

A European, whom we will call Smith, in a fairly important civilian position, one afternoon was riding a motor bicycle a few miles from Karachi on a main and much frequented road. He had been inspecting some work and was on his way back to his home in cantonments. Smith never returned and all traces of him were lost, in spite of the most exhaustive inquiries and investigation all over India. The man, and the mystery, were soon forgotten, as such things are in India.

One day, eight months later, a haggard wretch, clad in rags, and with his fingernails worn entirely away, reappeared in Karachi. No one recognized him at first, but, in spite of his now being an imbecile, he knew

his name and where he had come from. No explanation whatsoever could be dragged out of him and he was sent home.

The man who told us this story in the bar said that the 'Powers that Be' were quite sure that Smith had incurred the very grave displeasure of some potentate. He had been kidnapped and forced to do severe manual labour, combined with mental and physical torture, from which he had either been released or had escaped.

This story produced others, telling of blood and terror, and corruption, only thinly veiled by our veneer of Western civilization. If I told these stories they would not be believed, and so I will content myself with repeating one of Indian life which is not without grim humour. It shall be told as if from one of the lips of the actors.

"An ancient man squatted at my feet, his toothless gums showing behind thick lips surrounded by thin wisps of moustache and beard, and his full, Isabella-coloured dhoti tucked in under his crossed legs.

" 'Aye, sahib, I am a charmer of snakes. Wouldst thou like to see my children? They dance very prettily.' The man pulled toward himself the flat round basket with its tightly fitting cover.

" 'No,' I said, shaking my head. 'I have no love for snakes. But tell me how do you come by those you call your children?'

" 'Sahib, I go out into the jungle to certain spots known to me, and there I sit before the hole and sing songs on my pipe. Then, if God wills, they come up out of the ground, and I catch them, handling them very gently.'

" 'How do you catch them?'

“ ‘ With these, sahib.’ The old man held up a pair of skinny claws. ‘ But swiftness is necessary, because my children are quick-tempered before they become to know me, their father.’

“ ‘ Have you ever been bitten ? ’

“ ‘ Aye, sahib, when I was a little younger and the tale is not without interest. Two of my children died, and because it is by them that I live, I had to seek others. With my empty basket and the pipe I went out one night of the full moon into the jungle and came to a cobra’s hole that was known to me. I played my pipe very sweetly, and then putting my ear to the hole I heard the rustling deep down in the earth and knew they were there.’ The ancient stopped, and chuckled, and I knew that something unpleasant was coming.

“ ‘ It was then I heard movement behind me as I sat before the hole, and I turned and saw Durga Dass approaching. Durga Dass was also a charmer of snakes and my enemy. He cried aloud at once saying that the hole was his and that I was a thief, and he called me other vile names. There followed much argument and bending down he pulled my beard so that we rolled on the ground, raging together. It was then that two cobras came up out of the hole and bit us. One took me by a toe and the other fastened his jaws on Durga Dass’ forearm. We both cried aloud in our fear and fell apart. I took my knife and at once cut off my toe, but my enemy could not cut off his arm, and that cobra was a great male who would not release his grip. Durga Dass was an aged man and he danced in the moonlight crying to me for aid. But I laughed, and told him to aid himself. And so Durga Dass, my enemy, the evil one, the liar, and the would-be-thief,

died there in the jungle. He died slowly and with much pain. When the great cobra opened his jaws I took that slayer of my enemy, and he was with me for many years, bringing me much fame and money. I took also his wife who had bitten me, and I told the tale in many places, showing my children who grew to love me. Doubtless it was the will of God.' "

When the story-telling was over we went across to the mess for dinner, where stories of a different nature were taken up after the port had gone round the highly polished table. Here is one fit for publication, and not without humour to those who know India, or those out of it.

Two retired Indian Army colonels meet in Piccadilly, and the following conversation takes place.

Colonel P. : " Well, old fellah, fancy seeing you."

Colonel W. : " Hullo. Funny, you know, just met Ruskin."

Colonel P. : " What, not old Ruskin of the Rajputs ? "

Colonel W. : " Yes. And I ran into Blake as well."

Colonel P. : " What, not old Blake of the Baluchis ? "

Colonel W. : " Yes, it was old Blake of the Baluchis all right."

Colonel P. : " Well, well. I ran into Hake last week."

Colonel W. : " What, not that fellah in the Hyderabads ? "

Colonel P. : " Yes, that's the man."

A slight pause follows.

Colonel W. : " Well, old fellah, and how's the wife ? "

Colonel P. : " Not so well, you know. Not so well. Just left her in bed with gout."

Colonel W. : " What, not old Gout of the Gurkhas ? "

## CHAPTER VIII

ON the southern side of the Ghats a narrow-gauge railway connects Ootacamund with the plains, and this piece of line is said to be one of the loveliest in the world.

I took a seat in a train waiting in the station which was to take me on the first part of the long journey across into Ceylon. It was an afternoon of mist, and rain, where low clouds tore across the hills in ragged patches, and with bursts of wind-blown rain. I was not really sorry to leave Ootacamund because the place was dull, being almost empty of Europeans, and those who did live there spent most of their time playing bridge.

With several disconcerting jerks, and much panting from the engine, we pulled out, and the extraordinary mixed twenty-four hours of travel began. The first portion of the line down to Wellington was of little interest, but gradually we emerged from the heights and descended the sides of a series of stupendous valleys, which bit deeply into the mountain-sides as they flowed downwards. Thousands of feet deep, their bottoms were filled with masses of vegetation out of which sprang gigantic trees, and rushing torrents spouted between vast boulders. The sides rushed upwards in supreme grandeur to the grey crags, immense cliffs, and the bald, hoary heads of the mountain tops. Wherever there was the slightest holding-

ground the great trees flourished, and beside them the waterfalls gushed and cascaded. Some were as fine as lace, but others poured mightily, roaring in their eagerness to reach the quiet haven of the lower rivers.

This was a breeding-ground for strange legends ; a battle-ground for the elements, and a sanctuary for giants. Hugging the mountain-sides we slid cautiously downwards. I gazed across the valleys to where the higher clouds caressed the hill-tops with pointed fingers, but the lower ones were more heavy and broken, dashing against the crags and fleeing up the gorges like ghost hunting ghost. They mingled, parted, and dispersed, with bewildering rapidity, causing the shadows to dance madly across the tree-tops.

Crossing some ravine we would hang momentarily as if suspended in mid-air. Beneath was the gloomy depth out of which came the sound of a hidden cascade, and the tree-tops brushed our wheels. On rounding some tremendous hill-side there would come small panoramas of the distant plains, all chrome and rosy in the light of the sinking sun. Tiny stations clung precariously, and each had its small hovels at one end where women peered out as they suckled their babies, and the older children cried shrilly to us as we slid past.

The hours drew on and gradually the cool, clear mountain air was left behind and the atmosphere became hot and moist, until at last we quickened our pace to emerge on to a wide, sandy river-bed of the lowest valley. Paradise was lost under the hot sun, and in the tiresome glare beside the groves of coco-nut trees planted in orderly rows, but I comforted myself with the thought that I might find it again in the high hills of Ceylon.

At the railway junction of Mettupalaiyam I had to change trains, and whilst doing so had a hurried meal in the station restaurant which was as bad as such things can be. The following morning a hot dawn brought yet another form of country ; a moist, fertile, water-logged land, softened by mists. Rice fields stretched away on all sides, and herons, deep in meditation, stood in the innumerable ponds. Everywhere was the tall coco-nut palm ; the vivid green, huge and ragged leaves of the plantain ; the loin-clad, thin cultivator at work on his field, and, of course, the water buffalo.

Hot and damp and a little bad-tempered, after a restless night, I told Mullu Ram to serve breakfast in the compartment next door whilst he tidied the one I was in. Dressed in an open-necked shirt and a pair of shorts I sat on the bunk next door and ate an indifferent meal. Half-way through it I became aware of acute irritation on the lower side of my thighs, and behind my knees. Investigation showed that there were other occupants in this compartment who had also been breakfasting, but upon me. Bugs had crept out from the seat, feasted, and retired again. Hastily, and wrathfully, I searched for them to wreak my vengeance, but they were not to be found. At the next stop I complained bitterly to the guard of the train, who smiled unbelievably. I showed him the visible evidence, but he still would not be convinced, and his attitude implied that I must have brought the insects with me. This did nothing to sooth my annoyance.

The long, hot day wore on, and after luncheon we arrived at Madura. A large and holy city, there is a vast shrine here dedicated to the goddess Meenskshi,



the fish-eyed, and wife of Shiva; and visitors are allowed unusual freedom when being shown over it. It is said to be magnificent, having much of the best of Hindu carvings, but I did not leave the train to see it. Hindu temples have little appeal for me, there being far too much elaborate fussiness in the designs; besides much is also phallic. Every pillar, doorway, roof, and wall, is a jumbled mass of carvings, which first bewilder and then offend the eye. I prefer the clean simplicity of the Mohammedan, in the same manner as when comparing an Anglican cathedral with the stuffy ornateness of a Roman Catholic one.

The train drew slowly into the large station at Madura, and it was possible to catch glimpses of long, crowded, grubby streets in the city, all of which I knew must smell as only such places can smell. The platform was packed with a varied mass of people, who behaved exactly as they did in the North. If you judged by the noise, excitement, and surgings, which were taking place, you might have thought that a full-blown riot was in progress. The scene gradually became quieter and the station vendors appeared, and rarely have I seen such a varied assortment of food and drink likely to appeal to Indian customers. There was even ice cream, and vividly being able to visualize the conditions under which it was manufactured, the thought of it made me shudder.

Besides the food sellers there were those who offered trinkets, fly-whisks, newspapers, and soap. One ancient implored me to buy small, quite attractive, and well-made fish, scorpions, and lobsters in silver, whilst another offered beautiful lengths of coloured silks, two pieces of which I was unable to resist. Another

hawker held up a bottle of medicine which was new to me. I examined one and surprise was followed by extreme amusement. It was said to be a potent aphrodisiac, and its claims to success were frankly and terrifyingly expounded on the label. I should astound my household, become instantly rejuvenated, kindled like a raging fire, and imbued with the strength of elephants, were but a few of the probable results from drinking this liquid.

Beggars followed close upon the heels of the vendors, and the sight of these unfortunate creatures sickened even me, used as I was to such sights. They crawled, sidled, and slithered, up and down the platform between the legs of the passers-by, as they displayed their deformities, or diseases. Then came an aged dame and her tiny granddaughter, and the old lady, catching my eye upon her, hobbled up to the carriage window. She resembled my childhood picture of a witch more closely than I could have thought possible. About four feet high, she looked incredibly aged with her white hair hanging in strands, her bent figure shapeless, and the hand which fiercely held her stick was a claw. Her nose and chin almost met, but the pair of colourless eyes which looked up into my own were still bright and intelligent, and I was sure that she still held authority over her descendants. The dame said nothing, but the child whined and held out a hand no larger than the petal of a full-blown rose. I dropped a small silver coin into it and then the old woman did a curious thing. She said nothing, but, raising her stick, she made a sign closely resembling that of the cross. For a long time I wondered if it had been intentional.

Not long before the train pulled out again, after its prolonged halt, a fearful commotion arose outside a carriage farther down the train towards the engine, and leaning out of the window I watched a crowd collect exactly as it does at home. People dashed out of rooms, offices, and cubby holes, on to the platform, as they surged about a carriage door, and there were several coloured pugarees of the police to be seen above the heads of the crowd. A woman then began to scream indignantly, and the crowd parted to allow the policemen to drag away a plump, elderly Indian, who was considerably dishevelled and in the highest state of excitement. He howled his bitter lamentation, coughing with breathlessness, whilst at his heels was obviously his wife. She beat her breasts and implored sympathy from the interested passers-by. Inquiries from a railway official led to the following conversation.

"Oh, yes, saar. It is indeed a pretty damn case. He is a very big bad man. He shamelessly insults the ticket-collector."

"Why?" I inquired.

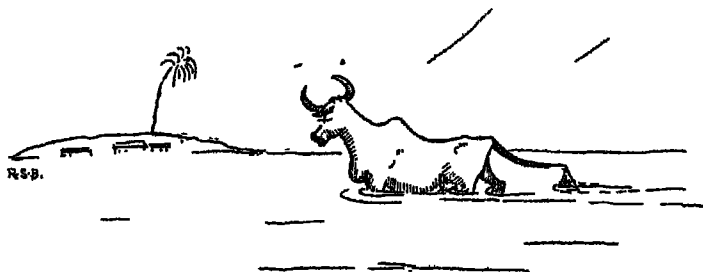
"Oh, he does try to travel minus a ticket for his wife. The ticket-collector he tells him to disengage from the train. The bad fellow insults the collector and hits him a pretty damn whack. The wife she bite another wife, just like a female tigress. They fight together."

"But why did the wife bite?"

"Saar, I do not know, but the man he goes to jail." And with this I had to be content.

The country from Madura southward gradually became more sandy with great stretches of water, until at last we ran on to that very long and narrow strip of

land which juts out into the Palk Strait and whose point forms one end of the Adam's Bridge. It was when traversing this neck of land that I witnessed a strange sight. On both sides of the railway line water stretched to the horizon, but on the left, and in the middle distance was a small low island on which were a few palm trees and two single-storied buildings. A few fishing boats lay at anchor near by, with their sails mirrored in the calm water, which caught all the glow from the setting sun. Half-way towards the island and at least half a mile from land was a solitary cow. For a surprised moment it seemed to me as if she were actually walking on the sea, but a second glance showed the water reaching to her udders.



The neck of land, thirty miles in length, seemed interminable, and not until sunset time did the train draw into the station at Dhanushkodi. There followed a long walk across thick, loose sand, and railway sleepers, to the jetty, at which was moored a large cross-channel steamer. In her I obtained a much-needed cup of tea in the saloon, where I made the acquaintance of a plump, jovial French missionary father.

This father was an educated and charming person, who had spent many years in southern India, and he was full of unusual information and stories. Taking me up on to the deck he pointed out a long spit of sand, which formed the western edge of the harbour. On it were many long, low wooden shacks. To this spot came, or were sent, the sons of high caste, old-fashioned Hindu Indian families, to undergo a rigorous cleansing process. Every time members of these families made a trip to Europe, on their return they were forced to spend several weeks on this particular spot, where, many times a day, they waded out into the sea and so gradually cleansed themselves of the



hateful contamination. They were then allowed to return to the fold.

The sun was setting as we left the harbour and forged ahead in a north-easterly direction across the romantic water towards that still more romantic island of which I had seen so little. The hot, busy port of Colombo I knew, but now there were the

wondrous interior, the dead cities, the tea plantations, and the hills to be seen and enjoyed. Leaning over the rails near the bows I gave myself up to the pleasure of gliding over a tropical sea at sunset time, with the cool, dying breath of day disturbing my hair.

The sea was sapphire, and the half-light rosy, and, except for the single, high note from a solitary gull, all was peace. Away on the starboard bow was the famous Adam's Bridge, which, according to legend, is the remains of a vast causeway built by Rama when he invaded Ceylon in the dawn of history. This is told in the great Hindu epic, Ramayana, when Rama crossed the bridge, with an army, in search of his wife, who had been abducted by the King of Lanka. He was said to have been aided in building the causeway by Hanuman, the monkey god. Actually, the bridge is a chain of sand-banks, thirty miles long, some of them dry and others never more than three or four feet under water at high tide. Many persons have walked across them into Ceylon, but a dredged portion has to be crossed by swimming.

Peering ahead I could see the coastline of Ceylon as a pencil smear across the clear horizon. It was curious to consider that Buddha himself had three times made this crossing and that once the island had been tributary to China for thirty years, and, finally, that we had only owned it for just over a hundred and thirty years.

I was suddenly recalled from my dreaming by the sound of a heated argument which rapidly grew close to where I was standing. Turning about I faced my bearer who was almost in tears with rage and excitement, and beside him stood a large, scowling, minor

Indian railway official. When I grasped the reason for the scene it appeared that the official had descended upon the bearer, weighed his single tin box, and found that it was a few pounds over the allowance permitted on a bearer's ticket. The man had then brow-beaten the lad, ordering him to pay some exorbitant sum for the over-weight. This, I knew, was an Indian method of lining your pockets, and the official had picked on the bearer knowing that he must be comparatively wealthy. I took the matter in hand, and before I had finished I could have cheerfully strangled that official: most certainly had we been alone I should have kicked him severely round the deck. As it was I was forced to pay a small sum as an excess fare, but not before I had taken the man's name and number. A subsequent and indignant letter to the headquarters of the railway brought about a refund, and the satisfaction of knowing that the official had been reprimanded.

It was eight o'clock before the red harbour lights of Talaimanner were passed, and we had tied up to a wharf on the far side of which was a waiting train. The train was a fine one, in which I had a good dinner and then retired to my luxurious sleeping compartment where I was to be called at one o'clock just before reaching Anuradhapura, my destination. The prospect of being thrown off the train at this ungodly hour was softened by the fact that I was under the impression I was to be met by a high-powered car, and carried off to a first-class hotel situated among the famous ruins, where I should continue my broken slumbers. It was perhaps fortunate at that time that I was not in possession of the true facts.

Before going to sleep I studied once again the brief

known history of the dead city, which was said to rank in interest with the more famous ruins of the world. Here are a few notes.

Anuradhapura is the largest of the ancient capitals of Ceylon, and it lies buried in the heart of dense forest on the western side of the island. The city is about two thousand years old, and is said to have covered the incredible area of 265 square miles. It was founded by King Pandukabaya in 437 B.C., and named after the constellation of Anuradha. The city reached its greatest magnificence about the year A.D. 1, but suffered severely at the hands of the early Tamil invaders, who came over from south India, and it was evacuated in A.D. 760.

Reading of these things I was filled with pleasant anticipation, forgetting in my eagerness the countless lost illusions I had experienced in the past.

At the appointed hour I was awakened by the car attendant, and leaving the comfortable bed I sleepily dressed and collected my belongings. During sleep, however, the position of the fan had unaccountably moved, with the result that a horde of hungry mosquitoes had feasted gloriously upon my person. But what did that matter? I was nearing Anuradhapura, a goal I had long sought.

Slowly the train drew into a long station, and I was told that I had arrived. I had to accept this because the place was as black as the road to Hell, upon which flitted a few ghostly figures each carrying a tiny lamp. Surrounded by the baggage, I waited whilst the bearer went in search of coolies. A night wind moaned eerily in near-by trees, and the engine of the train I had just left panted like some vast monster.



In due course I found myself at the exit where the motor was waiting for me, and I promised myself a long, cool beer before I sank into the arms of an all-embracing bed of the first-class hotel.

I gave up my ticket to a sleepy collector and went out on to the roadway. Where was the motor car? I could not see it. Inquiries from the ticket-collector brought to light the fact that none had been seen.

"Where is the hotel?" I inquired.

"Sahib, it is three miles from here," replied the collector, sadly.

"If there is no motor car, then how am I to reach it?" I asked, fretfully.

The man shrugged his shoulders and pointed to where, close by, were several very primitive, square bullock carts waiting in a row, and drawn by pairs of bullocks with long curved horns.

"There are those, sahib."

"Do you expect me to ride three miles in one of those?" I demanded, furiously.

"As the sahib wishes."

In the end, there being no alternative, I was forced to engage two of the carts, and so, clambering into one, I left the indignant bearer to follow in the other. The vehicle was a small, square affair, with tyreless, wooden wheels and a single plank across the middle on which I had to sit with my knees in the back of the semi-naked driver.

That outrageous journey commenced by the driver whacking his beasts with a stick, and making a noise like an ape with indigestion. I clung desperately to the sides of the cart as the beasts broke into a quick trot. We scampered over a road full of holes, around

sharp bends, over numerous hump-backed bridges, through a darkness that was almost tangible. I found time to consider how surprised some of my acquaintances would have been could they have seen me at this time.



Bitten by many insects, thirsty, chilly, and very angry, I was bumped and crashed through the night, my suffering body violently jarred with every heavy lurch. The bullocks, however, slowed down after the first mile and could only be induced to move at all by constant whackings, which resulted in convulsive quickening of pace and consequent torment to myself. A full moon then burst out from behind a heavy bank of cloud, and I saw that we were passing through a sleeping village where the trees closed in overhead.

On and on. Would this accursed hotel never appear? Where was I being dragged? Should I be expected? Perhaps the telegram had gone astray which would account for the non-appearance of the motor car?

Then came the disturbing thought that the driver of this fiendish conveyance had lost his way, or was going to another establishment. Surely no civilized hotel could be so far from a station ?

Just when I had given up hope of ever arriving anywhere we swerved violently to the left, and entered what was obviously a large garden, and, finally, drew up under the portico of a straggling, single-storied building which proclaimed itself to be the hotel I was seeking. Clambering out of the cart, and staggering drunkenly from cramped stiffness, I went into a lighted hall. *The place was deserted, there were a few cane tables and chairs dotted about on the tiled floor, and on the walls were many lurid travel advertisements. There were a few bedraggled plants in pots, and many trade journals strewn across the tables, intermixed with ash-trays which proclaimed the excellence of someone's beer.* To the right a door opened on to a dimly lighted and deserted dining-room, and directly facing the entrance was another which led to the private portions of the hotel. Seeing an electric bell I pressed it, and it rang raucously but distantly.

Several moments passed, and except for the buzzing of insects, silence reigned. A wave of the deepest depression surged over me as I stood in that vile, servantless hall. Was it for this I had come so far, and endured so much, only to be left stranded in the middle of a thick jungle, in a sleeping hotel of doubtless acute discomfort ? Striding forward I decided that, if necessary, I would drag the hotel-keeper from his bed, wherever it might be, even if he were sharing it with his wife, or someone not his wife. Just as I reached the far doorway I noticed, tucked away behind

two cane chairs, a white-clad, shapeless figure asleep on the floor near the wall. None too gently I stirred it with a foot, and bemused with heavy sleep the figure, with many a strange grunt, arose and faced me. What I said to this faithless watchman is neither here nor there, but within half an hour I was composing myself to sleep on a board-like bed, and under a mosquito net which smelled strangely and most unpleasantly. Before closing my eyes I vowed that I would extract vengeance from someone when I awoke.

At eight-thirty a dishevelled Mullu Ram brought in my tea, and pulling aside the mosquito curtain I looked about a primitive bedroom whose colour-washed walls were stained with damp; the furniture cheap and nasty; and on the air a sense of dreary neglect. The bearer caught my eye and shook his head gloomily.

"This is a bad place, sahib. Will the Heaven-born inspect his bath water?"

I would, and did. From a rear door I was led out on to a veranda and across to a cubby hole in which was a small tin bath and a thunder box. (A thunder box is the name always given to the square, wooden box, upon which you meditate in India and its neighbouring countries.) The water in the bath was a dark brown in colour and I looked at it in astonishment.

"There is no other," explained the bearer. "All the water in this place is as that is. Will the sahib use it?"

I was forced to use it, and after an indifferent breakfast in a deserted dining-room I sought out the management. In raging tones I raised my voice in

complaint to the reception-clerk, but was thwarted instantly. The telegram had not arrived and so I was not expected. The pleasant young man smiled soothingly.

"But, sir, if we did not know of your coming how could we send a car for you?"

I evaded this argument.

"My bed was like a floor-board, and the washing water disgusting."

"I am very sorry, sir, but all the water here is like that. Really it is very healthy."

I snorted.

"Well, what about the bed and my primitive bedroom. This is supposed to be a first-class hotel?"

The young man smiled again with engaging frankness.

"You must remember, sir, that we are not in Colombo or Kandy, but in the depths of a jungle, and things are not easy to get here. By the way, sir, these have come for you."

He held up a small bundle of letters and the sight of them instantly dispelled my ill-humour.

"You will, of course, wish to see the sights at once. I will arrange a car for you, and also a guide," continued the clerk as I snatched the letters.

"How much will it cost?" I inquired suspiciously.

"One pound for the whole morning, and this includes the guide as well."

"Can't I see them on foot?"

"You do not seem to realize, sir, that the ruins are many miles in extent. No, a car is absolutely necessary. I will arrange it for ten o'clock."

At the appointed hour a large touring car arrived

and in it was the guide, a small, elderly man with a white beard, and a devastating manner. Sitting in the back beside this person we swept down the drive towards the road and on the way I noticed several signs requesting visitors to refrain from damaging the ancient monuments in the grounds : afterwards I searched for them, but could find none.

The way led by means of side roads into a main street lined with the usual open-fronted shops, and it was gay with bright colours, including the brilliant yellow shawls of the many Buddhist priests. At its lower end the street branched and in the fork was the first of our sights. This was a considerable area of ground in which had been placed, in orderly rows, a forest of upright, grey stone posts, each about four or five feet in height. This was pointed out as being the remains of a famous temple. What the posts were for I do not know, unless they were to support a very large wooden floor, or platform. During the morning I saw many other traces of such construction.

I was not very impressed by this sight, and said so to the guide, whose patronizing manner increased so much as to be infuriating. Without actually saying it he managed to convey the impression that, from the very first, he had considered me to be of mean understanding and quite unworthy to be shown what was to be seen.

From that place onwards I was led many miles over a vile road through an untidy forest. I was shown more posts ; several shallow, decorated bathing tanks ; and a large, solitary Buddha.

“ But where are the ruins ? ” I inquired at last.

“ These are the ruins that I have shown to you,”

said the guide severely. "People come from all over the world to see them. They are very famous."

"But all you have shown me are a few posts and bathing tanks. I do not call those ruins," I replied, angrily.

I was seriously annoyed, and the guide, sensing this, lost his air of superiority for a few moments.

"Wait, sir. I have something of much interest to show you."

Several more miles were traversed over a road which gradually became worse, and I spent as much of my time in the air as I did upon the seat. We halted at last close to yet another bathing tank and the remains of a small temple, but I was led past them to a spot where a few feet of turf had been removed. Embedded at my feet was a large, flat, deeply and elaborately carved piece of stone. Bending, I examined it more closely and was astonished to find that it was an Oriental form of lavatory.

"Is that not of much interest," observed the guide, in tones of the deepest satisfaction.

I admitted that it was.

We then started back to the hotel, and on the way I realized several things. I had spent a hot, damp morning being driven willy-nilly through a dull forest; I had parted with a hard-earned pound; and, finally, I had come from the other end of the world to see these ruins, and the only thing of real interest they had to offer me was a lavatory. I am sure that these ruins are of limitless interest to those who are able to see beneath turf and undergrowth, but until someone removes these obstructions I shall remain unimpressed with Anuradhapura.

Before I stepped out of the car at the hotel the guide said to me :

" I hope you have spent a pleasant morning, sir ? "

" Oh, yes. Charming. Delightful," I replied with heavy sarcasm, which was lost upon the guide.

" Ah ! Then perhaps you would like to visit the rock temple this afternoon ? "

" How much ? "

" Fifteen shillings, sir."

" If you must know, I wouldn't give you five shillings for the whole of your rotten ruins," I said, stepping out of the car with dignity and promptly tripping over the single step of the portico.

Removing my topee I sat down at one of the tables in the hall of the hotel and ordered a long, cold beer. With the drink came a party of English people consisting of a woman, a youngish man, and an elderly one. I welcomed their appearance with pleasure, not having spoken to one of my own race for several days. I greeted the younger man, who had seated himself nearest to me, and instantly the woman and he regarded me as an offence ; the elderly man ignored my presence altogether. Surprised, but not discouraged, I tried to talk to them, but it was not unlike trying to deal with a pair of wives of newly-created industrial knights. Subsequent inquiries brought to light the fact that this was a mission out from home, to inquire into the cause of certain tropical ailments, and that, in fact, the elder man was a knight.

During luncheon I ruminated over the incident, sympathizing heartily with foreigners who complain of our grossly offensive airs of superiority. My attempts at conversation had obviously been those of a person



begging a friendly word from one of his own race, and I had been treated with contempt. I shuddered to think what might have happened had I been a foreigner. I hope one of the party reads this.

Lying on my hard bed for the usual afternoon rest I decided that a visit to the Bo Tree was indicated ; that at least would not fail me. Had not my father told me tales of this famous tree, and shown me one of the leaves from its sacred boughs ? Perhaps, after all, my visit to this benighted spot would not be entirely wasted.

After tea, and another brown bath, I set out on foot, having learned that the Bo Tree was situated in the town through which I had passed that morning. Down the drive monkeys chattered at me from the tall trees, and under foot was the moist, fertile earth out of which sprang many kinds of fantastic vegetation, none of which could be considered attractive.

An air of languor pervaded the main street of the town, where the paunchy shopkeepers still dozed as they squatted guarding their wares from the evil-minded. A few of the good-looking Buddhist priests were strolling about in couples, fingers interlocked, a stray brat or two played in the dust, whilst lean cats and dogs sought for food in the garbage at the roadside.

The Bo Tree was easy to find and stands in the middle of a large, walled compound, whose high gateway is elaborately carved and decorated. Thrilled by anticipation I went into the compound, to discover that the tree was almost entirely hidden by a high platform and guarded by wide flights of steps and locked gates. I approached the sacred spot as closely as was possible, and saw that the tree, instead of being the gnarled old

veteran I had expected, consisted merely of numerous small trunks which appeared to have taken root in the top of the platform; the main trunk, if there was such a thing, was entirely hidden. Well, what did it matter? I had seen the most famous of all trees, and with that I must be satisfied.

I wandered slowly round the courtyard, with its many small temples and alcoves, and then evading a Buddhist priest, who was hunting me for a donation, I scurried out on to the main road. A wide strip of park-like land led to the ruined but splendid paved entrance of the Gold Dust Dagoba. A dagoba is a conical hill rising, in many cases, to hundreds of feet in height, and is built of sun-baked bricks; and each dagoba is said to contain a Buddhistic relic. The one I was approaching was as impressive as the Cheops pyramid, being a truly gigantic affair which had been entirely faced with smooth brick-work, and it was then undergoing repairs. At the base was a high platform which gave the effect that the dagoba was actually built upon it.

Marvelling at the amount of labour which must have been used in its construction, I wandered around the platform, meeting scattered groups of priests, none of whom would smile or show signs of friendliness.

The following day I left Anuradhapura without regret, and with a lighter pocket.

## CHAPTER IX

THE train journey from Anuradhapura to the hill station of Nuwara Eliya by way of Kandy was typical of its kind. There were, at first, great stretches of thick jungle where in the clearings were paddy-fields, and ragged plantains, which in turn gave way to thick undergrowth, as we forced our way up into the hills. Then came fine views of the distant plains, deep gorges, and mountain torrents.

At noon we drew into the station at Kandy, where I had to change trains, but with an interval of two hours. Leaving the station I found myself in the lower portion of the town, where the main street wound steeply upwards towards the lake and Temple of the Tooth. Like most streets in Ceylon it was bustling, colourful, and a strange mixture of East and West, but having seen such places before I did not linger. After a brief glimpse of the large, artificial lake I went into the cool and very pleasant lounge of the leading hotel.

It was luncheon-time, and, in consequence, there was a mixture of interesting people seated at the small tables, and so absorbed in them did I become that I quite forgot that there were sights, such as the Temple of the Tooth, to be visited. There were parties of American women wearing airs of determined efficiency as they bustled to and fro, exchanging greetings, questioning, fetching letters, writing letters, or dangling bunches of keys ; there were business men at their pre-

luncheon drinks ; stray young women waiting with airs of expectant hopefulness and a sprinkling of local inhabitants in national costume. What interested me most of all were an elderly woman and a youngish man, who were seated at a table near by and in my direct line of vision. This was obviously a mother out on a visit to her son, a tea planter, who had been summoned from his remote estate.

The mother was typical of those women you find in our larger country homes where they live their placid lives, rearing sons, gardening, and tactfully running their households, and often difficult husbands. She, with her pleasant, aristocratic features, was dressed quietly, but expensively, and her fingers played nervously with a crumpled handkerchief. Her expression was one of adoration mixed with bewildered anxiety. The son was a large person who looked thoroughly discontented. His nose, eyes, and forehead, resembled his mother's, but his small, woman's mouth and weak chin were a throwback, and clearly showed weakness of character.

How well I could picture the probable circumstances which had led up to this little domestic scene. Sitting in my chair and watching them I put it into words.

Of course Richard had most mysteriously spent a lot of money, but, poor boy, he did so want a good time, and he was a little weak. Wasn't it natural that he should owe bills to his tailor and bootmaker ? Did not all boys do this ? She would have paid them if they had allowed her. Of course, it would have meant going without several things. Darling Richard, her only son and child, how could she ever deny him anything ?

Then there had been that awful family gathering, presided over by her husband. She remembered only too vividly his Day of Judgment face. But why should they have sent her son so far away ; surely there were places nearer home ?

Poor, darling boy. She had come such a long way, and he had not seemed very pleased to see her. Of course, she understood. It was so lonely and uncomfortable among all those horrid tea trees, or whatever they were. If only Richard had married that nice Tappington girl everything might have been all right.

And so she had torn herself away from her home, and garden, and come alone on this adventure ; she who had never been farther than Rome, and then not alone. I watched the man drink his beer sulkily and glance across the room at a girl seated by herself. The mother, laying a hand affectionately on her son's arm, said something to him and he turned his head, answered her, and most unexpectedly grinned. The expression which swept over his mother's face made me gulp and turn away.

A glance at my watch made me realize that I must hurry back to the station. On my way I wondered if the picture I had conjured up of this mother and son had been a true one. Oddly enough, there was a sequel, as the reader shall hear, and it showed that I was not far wrong.

Whilst seated at the window of my compartment, waiting for the train to start, I was considerably surprised to see a young Pathan standing close by. What on earth was he doing so far away from his wild hills in Northern India ? I beckoned to the man to approach and reluctantly he obeyed my summons.

"This is a long way from Peshawar," I said in Hindustani. "What are you doing here?"

This very good-looking young man, with a devil behind each of his grey eyes, looked at me sullenly.

"I sell things, sahib."

"Oh! Since when has a Pathan become a bunnia?" (a bunnia is a shopkeeper) I inquired, astonished. "What do you sell?"

"Just things."

"Where do you sell them?"

"In the hills."

"And what are the people of this country to you?"

The man, without replying, smiled, and it was a crooked smile, full of devilry, and I understood.

Later I made inquiries of a resident who knew the island well, and he laughed. It appeared that there were many Pathans in Ceylon, and they were all money-lenders, making much profit from the simple hill-folk, who were terrified of them.

Nuwara Eliya was cool when we arrived in the late afternoon; it was even as chilly as an October evening at home, but like Ootacamund it was difficult to realize that you were thousands of feet up in the air. I could see no particular reason for the hill station being where it was, except perhaps that there were more level spots here than elsewhere in the hills, and because it was surrounded by many tea estates.

From the railway station I drove to the Hill Club, where the secretary kindly allowed me to stay. Standing in pleasant grounds the club is a first-class one and run upon lines similar to those in London, where the public rooms are comfortable and well furnished,

and the food excellent. The only drawback was the fact that, at that time, it was so sparsely used by members. The planters in Ceylon, like those elsewhere in the world, foregather at week-ends when sometimes in the clubs the fun is riotous.

For several days I quietly, but thoroughly, enjoyed myself in this healthy, pretty station. There were many charming bungalows set in gardens ablaze with flowers; a good, large hotel; a race-course; and, lastly, the golf course. I do not know much about golf courses, but I am sure that this one, if not the finest in the East, must approach very closely to this standard. It occupies most of the central portion of the station and through the upper parts runs a wide mountain stream. From the first hole and the club house the fairways slope in rolling sweeps of vivid green turf towards a belt of gracious trees. Turning back, and to the left, there are several holes with fearsome hazards, which, on nearing the top end of the course, include the stream, ponds, and other oath-producing obstacles. The course is dotted with large trees, and thick clusters of them line the edges, giving it an air of a park, or vast garden. In the stream are numbers of fat trout, who glide like shadows over the nut-brown bottom.

On two occasions I made determined efforts to climb the surrounding hills, but was driven back by the steepness of the ground, and the dense nature of the undergrowth. For long periods during the day the clouds hung over these hill-tops, from where they often poured down heavy bursts of mist and rain, which swept the valley, driving everyone under cover.

On a Saturday morning I wandered into the crowded

bar of the golf club, and stood in a corner fascinated by the variety of types of men who drifted in and out of the room. They were all obviously planters, but how different to each other. Some were middle-aged, glabrous and podgy, or large and simian in looks; others were younger, slim and well groomed; and a few were callow fledglings just out from home, eager and most polite to their seniors. They mixed, parted, and drank, in that room with its small tables, golf trophies, and photographs of past members and golf celebrities.

Knowing no one, I stood listening to fragments of conversation, in which matches were being arranged, or acquaintances greeted. I had been vaguely aware that an argument was in progress between two men close to me, but suddenly my attention was abruptly attracted to them by a statement made in a loud tone of voice.

"Absolute nonsense, my dear fellow. The two ugliest things in the East are the water buffalo and a Gunner's wife. And don't I know it."

This remark was so novel, and so outrageous, that I turned to the two men and laughingly protested. They turned and stared at me.

"You're not a Gunner, by any chance, are you?" inquired the man nearest to me, a lean person with clear-cut features and grey eyes.

When I said that I was both men laughed and said they were sorry.

"I don't mind in the least," I said, moving closer to them. "But I am interested to know what caused you to make such a sweeping, and such an ungallant, remark."



"I was a Gunner once, myself, and I speak from bitter experience," said the lean man. "You being a Gunner must know it's true if you have ever served in India. Have you?"

"Yes, I'm there now."

"Well, isn't it true?"

"You can hardly expect me to agree with you, even if I secretly do so," I replied, laughing. "But I will admit that I have met some pretty grim wives in my time."

We were now joined by another man and introductions took place, thereby changing the conversation which I should have liked to have continued. In a short time I was meeting a stream of pleasant, friendly men, who pressed me to drink with them, to visit their estates, and to play golf. But gradually the bar emptied and I found myself alone with a man in the early twenties who had spoken to no one and who was looking vaguely unhappy. I asked him to drink with me, and after he had looked me up and down and realized that I was a stranger, he gloomily accepted.

"Where are you?" I inquired.

He mentioned a name unknown to me and I asked where it was.

"About twelve miles from here, over there," he replied, pointing towards one of the mist-crowned hills which could be seen through the open doorway.

"How long have you been out here?"

"Seventeen months."

"Like it?"

"No."

"Oh, and why don't you like it?" I asked, much interested.

"I hate it. I hate everything out here. And so would you," he said suddenly and fiercely. "All day I walk or ride about those blasted gardens until I'm dead beat and soaked with sweat. Then what happens? I go back and sit in my house. God, how I hate it. Day after day and week after week, shut in by all those hills with nothing but mist, and rain, and damp. No one to talk to and only my gramophone."

"Aren't there any other fellows besides yourself?"

"No. Two of them are married and the chap that was with me was sent home."

"Why?"

The man glanced at me and shook his head. I did not press the matter any further.

"Yes, it must be awful being alone every evening. I suppose you get fed up with reading, and know all the records by heart? But don't you go and see the married fellows and play bridge and things? They must live near by."

My companion drank from his glass and snorted.

"Me. They haven't got any use for me. Seem afraid that I'll make love to their wives. Besides, they are a dull crowd."

"I suppose lots of fellows feel as you do?"

"Yes. Some do. But you see, I like life, and dancing and things. I hate being alone. Always have."

"Well, you come in here quite often, I suppose?"

"No. What's the use? It makes it all the worse when I get back. Well, I'm off. Thanks." He finished his drink, said good-bye, and left me alone.

The following morning I set out to walk to one of the large tea estates which lay on the outskirts of the

station. The way led past the race-course with its white rails and large central building. On the outside of this building a flaming poster proclaimed that in the afternoon a bazaar would be held there. A line of cars stood outside and acting upon a sudden impulse I went into the building and stood just inside the doorway of a large room. The scene was so like a similar one at home that I smiled. Kindly matrons, young girls, and the vicar, were dashing about arranging stalls and flowers, asking advice of each other, and laying out many cups and saucers. On the stalls were all those articles we know so well, ranging as they do from home-made cakes and jam, to paintings by amateurs, cakes of soap, and pin-cushions.

The tea estate which I had chosen to visit was typical of its kind, being situated on the steep slopes of several hills. A road led downwards to a large single building which was the factory, and on either side, stretching upwards to the skyline, were the orderly lines of trees. The trees, known as *Thea Sinesis*, a flowering shrub, were not more than a few feet in height and were plump and rounded with bright, dark green, glossy leaves.

I knew that tea, like rubber, was dependent on a warm, damp climate which was constant, so that the tree was able to continue its growth throughout the whole year, but I was not in any way prepared for the flood of information which was so soon to be poured out for my edification. On entering the factory I was presented to an Indian overseer, to whom I expressed a fervent desire to be shown how tea was manufactured. He smiled, opened his mouth, and for over an hour he poured out a continuous stream of

information ; led me through many rooms ; up many stairs ; and showed me much complicated machinery.

In common with many people I have accepted tea without bothering to consider how it is produced. If asked how it was made I should probably have replied vaguely, suggesting perhaps that the leaves were dried in the sun, packed, and sent home. In that factory I soon learned what a complicated and fascinating process the manufacturing really is. In condensed form this is what I learned.

On an average there are three thousand trees to an acre and the young trees are left alone for two years. The pickers are women, and only pluck the buds and first two leaves from each stalk. A good picker can gather 30,000 shoots a day, and about 3200 shoots go to a pound of manufactured tea. The sooner the leaves reach the factory the better.

When the leaves first come into the factory they are placed in trays, and hot air is passed over them. This causes them to wither, reducing a hundred pounds in weight to about fifty-five. This is a slow and complicated business, and when completed the leaves feel soft and pliable. The tea is now passed through heavy rollers, which break down the structure of the leaf, and this rolling is often repeated as many as six times. It now passes to the fermenting-rooms where it is put on to trays stacked one above the other. This is a difficult and delicate business because the humidity and the temperature have to remain constant and to be carefully watched. The final operation, however, is the trickiest of all, and is that of drying. A fault here can ruin a whole batch of tea far quicker than any of the other processes.

The tea is now as we know it and passes to the women sifters and graders who, with sure fingers, remove all the stalks and inferior leaves.

I had just reached mental saturation point on the question of tea when a plump and very overheated European appeared on the scene. He looked worried and annoyed, but on seeing who I was his face cleared and he mopped his brow. I grinned, realizing that someone must have run off to tell him in the garden that a strange white man was inspecting the factory and he had jumped to the conclusion that I was a company official upon a surprise inspection.

I returned to the Hill Club and drank a nice cup of coffee.

After luncheon some kindly people carried me off in their car to a spot several miles farther into the hills where a party was to foregather for a picnic. The road was a pleasant, winding mountain one, with tea estates dotting the hill-sides in all directions. At the meeting-place, beside a rest-house, were two cars and standing beside them a group of five people. We parked our car near by and I was led forward to meet the remainder of the party. To my extreme astonishment I found myself being introduced to the mother and son in whom I had taken such a keen interest in the hotel down in Kandy. We then started to walk across a stretch of rolling, open moorland, each person carrying food and drink. I made a point of attaching myself to the mother, whose name was Lady Peters. (Not her real one.)

"Why did you look so surprised when we were introduced?" she inquired.

"For two reasons," I replied. "First, I know a

little of you because I now realize you live in my part of Essex, and, secondly, I saw you sitting with your son in an hotel in Kandy a few days ago."

"How strange," said my companion.

For several minutes Lady Peters asked me questions about myself and we talked of people we knew at home. Then, in answer to a tactful question of mine, she spoke and I learned a little of what I wished to know. I found that I had gone astray in the question of detail in the picture I had conjured up of this mother and son, but that in essentials I was correct.

Paul, her son, was a planter, but his present post had been begged from a friend in the City because Paul had refused to settle down. Failing to enter Sandhurst, thereby embittering his father, he had gone into the Navy, only to throw it up. He had lost a job in the City and, finally, had run riot as a minor Mayfair playboy. I suspected there was an enmity between father and son.

Lady Peters looked into my face with anxious eyes.

"I'm so worried about Paul. You are a man of the world. Do tell me. Do you think he is happy out here? Do you think he will settle down?"

"Yes, yes. Of course he will," I replied, lying without hesitation. "You need not worry, he'll settle down. It's a good life."

"Are you really quite sure?"

"Yes. But, of course, it may take a little time. You must realize how different all this is to London and the life he is used to. He is bound to find it strange and lonely at first."

"Well, I do so hope you are right. If he doesn't settle down I'm sure I don't know what will happen.

If only he were married. That would have been such a help and a comfort to me."

"Isn't there anyone at home?" I asked.

The question remained unanswered because at that moment we caught up with those in front of us who had halted. Rugs and coats were now spread out on the close turf and we sat down. We were evidently on what was the point of a vast spur which overlooked a valley, but nothing could be seen of it because, a few hundred feet below where we sat, there was a great bank of cloud which billowed to and fro. Our hosts were much upset at this state of affairs because this was a famous beauty spot.

Not long after tea had begun, however, someone gave a pleased exclamation and we left off eating to gaze downwards to where the hill-side became lost in the grey and white cloud. As if a hand were tearing it apart the cloud split and a long, narrow rift was formed. Slowly and uncertainly it widened and we were allowed to look for a few moments upon a view such as I have seldom seen equalled. Framed in cloud, hill-sides, studies in the deepest shades of green, blue, and grey, rushed upwards to an uneven skyline from the depths of a broad valley. To the left a heavy rain-storm was worrying its course across a tea estate; towards the middle of the picture a great patch of sunshine caused the damp vegetation to glitter and dance; and to the right an unusually low cloud trailed across the ground like the wind-blown veil of a bride. There were glimpses of waterfalls, dark woods, and a road which curved wearily up the hill towards where we sat. A sudden change of wind caused the cloud to reunite, and we returned to our tea.

It was a strange, almost unreal party. There were our host and hostess, distinguished, gentle, and kindly, pressing us to eat their food ; a stray young woman with a faintly catlike expression, who was, I suspected, produced for my benefit ; a queer couple, man and wife, who sat silent but most observant, their eyes watching our every movement as they munched, pausing only to drink tea ; and lastly Lady Peters and Paul.

Even our hosts realized that the party was an ill-assorted one and they made desperate attempts at conversation, but with little success. Lady Peters caught my eye across the table-cloth and smiled faintly. Paul sat looking like a gloomy child, but ate largely and answered vaguely the questions directed at him by the young woman.

The picnic ended in disaster. Cigarettes were being lighted when a rain-storm from behind us caught us unaware. There were cries of dismay, flasks, food, baskets, and rugs were snatched up by everyone, and we hurried back the long distance to the cars. Damply we drove homeward through a weeping country-side which tried to hide its tears in thick banks of mist. Wind moaned as we rounded corners and the wayside rivulets gurgled, rushing down to meet their companions in the stony river-beds.

My hosts laughed when I shook hands on parting and said it had been a lovely party.

The following day I left for Colombo and the P. & O. liner which was to take me up to Bombay.



## CHAPTER X

**B**EFORE first visiting Colombo I had formed a vivid mental picture of what the place was like. Many of my relatives and acquaintances had been there, and most of them were enthusiastic. I gathered that it was beautiful, romantic, fascinating, full of colour, with palm trees and vegetation. Curiously, however, they were vague as to details: I now know why.

My picture showed heavily wooded slopes with the harbour nestling at the base. There were bungalows amid the trees, gardens ablaze with flowers, palms waved in the balmy air heavy with scent, and the water of the harbour was the purest sapphire-blue. But what is Colombo really like? I hesitate to wreck possible dreams, but the truth must be told.

Colombo is quite flat, and for the most part utterly unromantic. It is a large, commercial city full of business houses, busy streets, and rushing motor cars. The atmosphere is that of a hothouse, being very damp. It rains heavily each day and thunderstorms hunt each other across a sun-bleached sky, roaring and snarling like a pride of bad-tempered lions. The harbour is small and cramped, and the water a dirty greenish yellow on which ply ugly but useful lighters and small craft.

The city is decidedly expensive and is often full of overheated tourists hunting madly for the supposed

beauty and romance. They hurry along the streets, crowd into the hotels, and buy hideous gifts to give to their friends at home. The wise visitor, however, makes at once for the leading hotel at the far end of the sea front and stays there until his ship leaves.

My readers may be shocked at this description and say that I am disgruntled and prone to exaggeration. Well, I hope that they will go one day and see for themselves if I speak the truth.

There is one strip of the port which can be quite attractive, and it is a long sea front which runs very close to the sea and ends at the gates of the best hotel. On the left is a wide stretch of green grass and broad road whose farther edge is lined with gardens in which are palm trees and flowering shrubs. On the right is the narrow strip of foreshore on which laps a lazy sea. I walked there on a calm, moonlit night and found it pleasant and even faintly romantic, or rather it would have been so if I had not been accosted so persistently.

The morning of departure arrived. I got up, had breakfast, and then prepared to leave the island. Ceylon, however, was not to part from me without some unpleasantness. It started by the baggage becoming mislaid between my room and the hotel portico. Raging demands to all within earshot produced activity among the staff who eventually traced it to the basement. Then my bearer could not be found in spite of much searching. Striving to keep calm I was forced to do the bearer's work in supervising the transfer of the baggage down to the customs quay. Here more trouble awaited. The officials insisted on ravishing me of every piece of luggage, including such

things as my attaché-case and typewriter, articles I never allow out of my sight when moving from one form of transport to another. All I was allowed to retain was my walking-stick on the lighter which was to take us across the harbour to the anchored liner. Furiously angry with the officials and their red-tape, I turned my back upon them and saw the missing bearer. Stupidly I cursed him heartily, with the result that he dithered and was useless for several hours.

Rumbling, I took my place in the bowels of the lighter and instantly found myself squeezed tightly between a plump, overheated American and a freely perspiring female. There followed a wait of half an hour, and to cap this indignity I was forced to pay a rupee for the trip.

In a crab-like manner we sidled across the water and slid under the vast, black bows of the liner. I went up the gangway prepared to loathe the ship; find fault with my cabin; and quite sure that at least one valuable piece of baggage would be missing, or at least damaged. The cabin, however, was large and comfortable, the luggage arrived safely, and the ship's lager was long and cold. My ruffled temper was then completely smoothed by the purser coming up to me in the smoking-room, presenting the captain's compliments and stating that he, the captain, would be pleased if I sat at his table. To those readers who have not travelled in one of the crack liners of the P. & O. this may not appear to have been an undue honour, but to me who knows the line well it was overwhelming.

The captains of these liners are so august that the

more shy of passengers hurriedly look away when they appear in public, the glory of their presence being too much for complete self-control. And now I had been asked to sit at the Great One's table. What could be the reason? Lack of more distinguished passengers? No, that was not the case, because there was an Eastern prince and his suite, and also a well-known diplomat in the ship. I never found the answer to this problem.

When I took my place at the round table in the saloon at luncheon I wondered who would share it with me. Eventually a young, shy, charming, and newly married couple sat down on my right, then came the captain, a short, bluff, blue-eyed person, typical of his breed. The usual opening conversation now took place, but it died away because the man and woman replied to questions in an embarrassed manner, and alternately regarded the captain and myself with widely open, faintly terrified eyes. They actually held hands just beneath the edge of the table, and the fact that the young man caught my eye and faint smile as I noticed this fact, did not help matters.

During the three days' journey up to Bombay I cannot remember that the captain and I agreed upon any subject. He would hurl some forceful opinion at me across the table and instantly I found myself in disagreement: so much so was this that we argued hotly and frequently and I found myself expressing sentiments which were as new as they were surprising. This upset the captain considerably and, in consequence, I derived much secret enjoyment from it. I should, however, much like to have heard what the young couple said about me in their cabin.

For three long, lazy days we slid over the rim of a summer sea with unclouded skies and cool, faintly scented breezes. The blue, slightly heaving sea was divided from the eastern horizon by the thin ochre line of the Cochin Coast on which rose up green mists of herded trees.

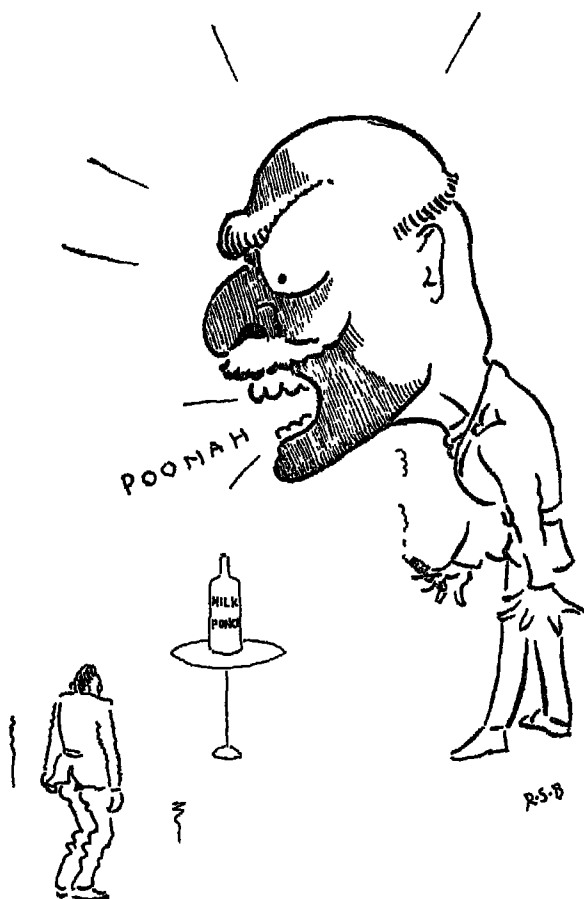
The diplomat and his family ignored me, and the prince kept to his suite, but I did not care ; I always had the latest disagreement with the captain to smile over to myself.

It was the 23rd of December when the skyline of Bombay was sighted, and from the rails of the ship I watched the water change to a dirty yellow and the buildings gradually take form. Bombay is, of course, the Gateway to India, and everybody who is anybody always comes to India by way of this port. To arrive at Karachi, Madras, or even Calcutta is unthinkable ; only soldiers and uncouth civilians do that. There is, in fact, an actual gateway built on the water-front, but it can only be used by the very great, so great that they never walked up the steps to fame, but were wafted up them. The words ' Gateway of India ' conjure up visions of blocks of gleaming white marble, vast and rotund pillars, in fact something resembling the Taj Mahal, instead of which this gateway is a mean, stunted affair, hardly worthy of notice. When the distinguished arrive at, or depart from, this gateway there are military bands present, much red carpet, perspiring guards of honour, and slim A.D.C.s resplendent in white and gold and each wearing a servile smile.

It is also from Bombay that the Pukka Sahibs leave

India for the last time on their way home to die in a London club. Most of the Pukka Sahibs come from Poona, which lies not far from Bombay to the south. The Pukka Sahib is not entirely confined to Poona, being found elsewhere in India, and even as far north as Peshawar, but never in the south.

The wealthier of Bombay's citizens often go up to Poona (always pronounced Poonah and never Pooner,



or just Poona) because there is a fine race-course and club. If they are rich enough they are received by the Pukka Sahibs. Humbly grateful, these outcasts sit at the feet of the Pukka Sahibs and drink in wisdom and, after being dosed with large quantities of milk punch in the Club of Western India, temporarily forget that they are in cotton, or vulgar commerce. At this stage the Pukka Sahib may even slap them on the back and call them "My dear fellah."

It is possible that the reader may not know the definition of a Pukka Sahib. He is in the Army, or the Indian Civil Service. He is usually red-faced, with a clipped moustache, and a loud voice. He has always been to a very good school and has exalted relations. He regards everyone with different views to his own as being a lunatic. He considers trade, journalism, and the artistic professions as being frightful, but necessary, evils. He has spent most of his life slaughtering fish, birds, or animals. He is a dictionary of what is, or is not, done. Finally, he will grab, at any time of day or night, another Pukka Sahib and force him to listen to unending streams of dull reminiscences.

We tied up at last at the quay-side beyond which was a long customs shed out of which I was ultimately to emerge in wrath and gloom. A coolie in the ship gathered up my belongings and, once in the customs shed, the inquisition began. I had not filled in a form correctly ; I had taken it to the wrong end of the shed ; I lost the coolie in the crowd ; and, finally, an ape-faced babu demanded to see into every case. He searched them to their depths with the result that their contents overflowed on to the grubby counter to be gazed at by the idle and the curious. I was

then questioned closely. Had I this, or that, and for what was the typewriter to be used? Clenching my fists I forced a smile to my lips and explained that it was for writing to my aged and about-to-die grandmothers. Why was it necessary to have a typewriter for this purpose? Because they were so aged that they could not read my writing. Why did their children not read my letters to their parents? Because I told them naughty stories and about the curiosity of the customs babu at Bombay. At this point the man realized that I was not being serious and he scowled.

The questioning continued and, being unable to endure it further, I snatched at a more senior customs officer who was passing and explained who I was, where I had come from and was going, and then requested to be released. I was, and instantly, but before leaving the shed I was ravished of nine rupees, being equal to thirteen shillings and sixpence, a fee of one rupee being demanded on each article of baggage no matter whether it was a trunk weighing half a ton, or a packet the size of a gas-mask case. This was gross extortion and the port must make quite a lot of money from this source in each year. I discovered also that it cost me altogether nearly thirty shillings to get from the ship to the hotel.

What now follows in this chapter is made up of sketches and impressions of Bombay, rather than a connected narrative, because to write about the city as it should be done would fill a book on its own.

I have called this book *India of the Rajahs*, but Bombay is India of the Merchant Princes, it being



one of the wealthiest of Eastern cities and certainly the most expensive to live in.

Unlike Singapore and Colombo, the city has in it much of great interest and its vast bazaars are fascinating, and in them it is possible to see every race, creed, and colour, from cities as far apart as Kabul and Suva, Peking and Cairo. To the sensitive visitor it can be exciting to walk through the teeming masses because he will be able to sense the ever-present tension which exists between the Hindus and the Mohammedans. Without warning this tension may break and then there are riots, broken heads, looting, and the paying off of old grudges, until the arrival of breathless, overheated, and exasperated British troops. He who finds himself involved in one of these outbursts will have enough excitement to last him a long time.

Here, put into a connected narrative, and with the necessary background, is a tale told by an American who became mixed up in a nasty little riot when on a tour of one of the bazaars. How accurate the main facts are I am unable to say, but the man swore that they were true and I see no reason to doubt him.

In the northern ward of the Chowk Bazaar, which is not far from the Flower Market, it was five o'clock on a warm afternoon. The narrow streets, which were little more than alleyways, began to fill up again and to throb with life; merchants were stretching and yawning as they dragged themselves out of the afternoon lassitude; the tailors, picture-sellers, and the cheap-jack shops were doing business and mangy dogs crept out of their corners where they had been asleep during the hot hours of the day.

Chandra Das had his shop on a corner in this ward and it faced a small open space in which was a water point. To all appearances Chandra Das was a cloth merchant, as his many rolls of cloth proclaimed him to be. For many hours of each day he sat in one corner of his tiny, open-fronted shop and entertained his friends, or sold small lengths of material after much bargaining and many doubts on the part of his customers.

In the early evening, almost before the lights were turned on, he had the shutters put up and the real business of the day began. What that business was has nothing to do with this story, but it was dark, and crooked, and most profitable. It involved much coming and going on the part of slim young men who whispered in his ear, and handed over rolls of notes before they went away tucking small packets into the tops of their dhotis.

On this particular afternoon Chandra Das yawned, tightened his dhoti over his drooping paunch, and then rubbed his hands over his face and looked out on to the open space which was still warm and drowsy. Two small and naked sons of a neighbour were splashing water over themselves at the water point; the deformed beggar, Narkund, dragged himself out of the shade and began to hunt for lice among his rags, and passers-by grew in numbers. It was a peaceful scene, and one which was no different to a hundred past ones, but Chandra Das had become inwardly perturbed. Some not fully developed and extra sense warned him that there was trouble in the air, and he was so certain of this that he called to his grandson to be at hand to put up the shutters in case

of need. Chandra Das' sense was correct, but what it did not tell him was the fact that two rival Hindu factions in a temple dispute were converging upon the open space in front of his shop. The temple itself was a considerable distance away, but the routes chosen by the demonstrators crossed at this point.

The first sign of trouble was the appearance of a hurrying white man who dashed across the rough stones and vanished down a side-turning. Chandra Das watched him with interest, an interest that doubled itself when the man suddenly reappeared like a turned hare and stood undecided close to the water point. It was then that Chandra Das heard the unmistakable sounds from an approaching crowd and he, not unnaturally, connected the crowd with the white man. Scrambling to his feet, and with trembling hands, he aided his grandson to put up the shutters; he had had experience of angry crowds in the past and it was best to be prepared for any eventuality.

The shutters never did slip easily into place, and on this occasion anxiety and the need for haste made him careless so that the shutter he was holding slipped from his hands and crashed on to the stones in front of the shop. The noise of this incident attracted the white man's attention. Running across the space the man leapt up on to the floor of the shop and Chandra Das yelped with surprise and fear. He never had had any use for white men, and now one who was undoubtedly being hunted was trying to take refuge in his shop. He must be prevented at all costs.

Chandra Das tried to use force to eject the stranger, but with lamentable results because the European was large and strong, and he pushed Chandra Das



(Top) ALL THAT CAN BE SEEN OF THE FAMOUS  
BO TREE

(Bottom) A PICTURFSQUE ROCK SHIRINE NEAR  
ANURADHAPURA



heavily in the chest with both hands so that he staggered backwards, slipped off the floor, and crashed down on to the shutter which he had dropped. Here he lay on his back waggling his arms and legs like a gigantic baby. Before he could pick himself up the head of one of the temple factions poured into the space. This crowd was armed with sticks, but, although excited, it was in no way dangerous.

Now Chandra Das, although he naturally did not know it, closely resembled one of the leaders of the rival party on whom the present mob was about to call. One man, who had tripped over him as he lay on the ground, looked down and promptly let out a howl of excitement.

"See. Here is the son of fifty thousand shameless grandmothers himself."

The man then lifted the stout stick that he was carrying and brought it down on Chandra Das' fat stomach with a resounding whack, causing him to yell with fear and anguish.

The crowd, which had become still for an instant, now strived to draw close to the scene.

"Yes. Yes. It is without doubt the shameless one. Let us beat him so that he will cry a different tune," shouted a dozen voices.

Chandra Das, who had now struggled to his knees, screamed that he was only a poor cloth merchant and a man of peace. But no one listened.

The white man, who had watched the scene from the back of the shop where he had taken refuge, now dashed to the rescue. In a single bound he cleared the floor of the shop and landed on the ground close to where the merchant was kneeling. His dramatic

appearance, combined with the fact that he knocked down a man, caused the mob to draw backwards in astonishment. Snatching up the stick from the hand of the fallen man, he waved it about his head and defied the crowd to advance on him.

Chandra Das now made a dash for safety and the crowd saw its victim escaping. It surged forward and in an instant the white man and the unfortunate merchant were lost in a whirling mass of sticks and men.

At that critical moment the head of the other faction arrived on the scene and found the space and further progress blocked by their rivals. Up to that moment neither side had meant to make real trouble, intending merely to demonstrate outside the Hindu temple, call each other rude names, and then disperse to their homes. But now there was strife in the air and it spread among both parties with great speed so that a general fight began on the far side of the space.

Several times the white man emerged from the struggling mass, but each time to be carried nearer the raised floor of the shop until at last he found himself wedged tightly against the sharp ends of the boards which dug painfully into his back. Chandra Das had managed to reach the back of his shop, but the crowd swarmed after him, dragged him out, and proceeded to beat him severely.

Next door to this scene, and just around the corner, was Sher Ali's grain shop, and it was here that the serious trouble really began. Sher Ali had been almost asleep when the affair started and so had been unable to remove his baskets of grain and open sacks of corn to a place of safety. The mob, surging to and fro, knocked off the baskets and spilled their contents and

trod on the corn sacks, scattering them in all directions, whereupon Sher Ali lost his head and sent out a series of bubbling yells for help.

"Fifty Hindu devils are looting me. Help, O Brothers. Help the Faith," he howled, his voice rising high above the general din.

Instantly every Mohammedan within fifty yards sped out of his house armed with whatever he could lay hands upon. Within a few minutes a full-blown and very nasty little riot was in progress. Men, breast to breast, strove to smite each other with sticks and pieces of iron; brickbats flew in all directions; and there were howls and yells of rage and pain and fright from a hundred throats. The more peaceably minded of the mob tried to force its way out of the space, whilst others, seeking blood and excitement, strove to get inside.

I will end this narrative in the American's own words.

"You never saw such a gar' darned mess as there was in that one-eyed little square. There was I jammed tight up against those blasted boards feeling as if I'd break in two any minute. The fat old josser was lying on the floor of his shop screaming like a Kensas train-whistle. Believe me, or believe me not, those gar' darned Indians were fighting like tom-cats on a down-town tin shanty. Both my eyes felt as if a hobo had hoofed 'em; some bastard had hit me across the back of the neck with a stick the size of a tree-trunk; me nose was bleeding and me pants was gone.

"Just when I thought I was done for and was becoming fair scared somebody from behind pulled



on my arm-pits and I came up out that mob just like a cork out of a gin-bottle. It was a police inspector who had found me by breaking in through the back of the shop.

"How did it end? I don't know. I was just too blasted glad to get out of it to care. But say, boy, you should have seen the faces of the folk in the hotel when I walked in on 'em looking as if I'd hit a cyclone.

"What really began it? How should I know? You'll have to figure it out for yourself."

The Taj Mahal Hotel is one of the most expensive and best known of the great hotels in the East. Only the wealthy or the extravagant visitor stays there, but I decided that, as I was about to leave India never to return, I should live there so that I might truthfully say I had done so.

A superbly groomed young man at the inquiry bureau dealt with my request as to the cost of a modest room. Casually, and with a supreme disregard for me as a person, he consulted a list and stated that I could be given a room at a price. This was a startling one, prepared as I had been for something unusual, and, in consequence, I was forced to decline the offer. The man shrugged his shoulders and turned to other business. At such a time there is little that irritates me more than an action of this kind. The fellow should have offered me a few words of sympathy for my inability to meet his price. I very nearly told him so, but instead turned away in search of my taxi and another and cheaper hotel.

I found, however, that the taxi had gone, the luggage had been taken off it, and that the fare was to

have been placed on my bill. Rather than face the trouble of dealing with this situation and finding another hotel I returned to the bureau and said that I would engage the room. Somewhere near the roof, the bedroom was rather as I had expected it would be. Sitting on the edge of the bed I smoked a cigarette and wondered what kind of Christmas this was going to be. It was Christmas Eve, I knew no one in the hotel, or the city, and I was depressed at the state of my finances which were rapidly becoming non-existent.

A bath and clean clothes put me in a fairer state of mind and going below I went into the large ball-room where a tea dance was in progress. Choosing a table from which I could see the whole room I sat down and prepared to be amused. I was, because there was a curious assortment of people present. Slim, well-dressed young Indians and their girl friends danced with an abandon seldom seen outside America, and matrons with their large families sat at swollen tables, and ate stolidly. These family parties were made up of a strange type which was neither European nor Indian, but a subtle blending of the two. The usual half-caste is mainly one or other of the races, and obviously so. I was particularly interested in the behaviour of the children, whose manners were excellent but gave the impression of being thoroughly unnatural. Boys and girls in their teens and dressed with great care asked permission to dance from their parents and then went on to the floor where they behaved like dolls, rarely smiling and looking out on to the assembly with a shy, scared light in their eyes. I was led to wonder where and how they lived.

Scattered about the room were Americans, stray tourists, and the younger business men of the city, as well as Parsees and young females with 'Come hither' looks in their sidelong glances in my direction.

Later in the evening I wandered down on to the ground floor of the hotel and into the well-known Harbour Bar. This is a pleasant room filled with small tables and chairs and it was crowded with men and women in evening dress.

I was just about to sit down at a table when I was hailed by a loud and hearty voice which proclaimed to the whole room who and what I was. Turning sharply I faced a man I had not seen for many months, a dapper little person with a red face, hot blue eyes, and a tooth-brush moustache. Room was made for me at his table, I was introduced to three other men, a double tot of drink was ordered, and, grinning, I answered a stream of personal questions. Those at nearby tables regarded us with interest.

Later we were joined by several naval officers from a ship in the harbour and who were known to me. The party from being merely hectic now became riotous. Several of them were going home to England the next day in the ship which I had just left, and I was made to promise faithfully to turn up for drinks before luncheon on the following day. We then broke up and I was left alone to eat an excellent dinner in the air-conditioned dining-room.

After the meal was over I went out to see what could be found in the way of cheap amusement, a thing not easy to find in Bombay. Not far from the hotel I found a beer hall made up to be a cellar, or a cave. Its interior was gloomy, small tables were dotted

about the walls and in the middle was a small space cleared for dancing. The room was crowded, and choosing a table near a far wall I ordered some lager and sat down to listen to a tall, underfed woman who was standing near a piano as she sang the song 'Down in the Forest' in a voice which would have reduced Melba to tears, or hysterics.

At the table next to my own and almost touching it were two soldiers, both of whom had had more than one bottle of beer. They were not drunk, but one had reached the talkative stage and was pouring out a tale of woe to his companion.

The older soldiers have one adjective and they use it whenever possible, and when excited, or angry, the manner in which they manage to introduce it five times into every sentence is a matter to excite horrified admiration. One day I shall find out the derivation of this word.

Listening to the conversation of these two soldiers I marvelled. It went something like this:

"I says to the ——er, what do yer think I am, a ——ing slave? An' what d'yer think the ——er said?"

"What did he say?"

"The ——er said if he 'ad any more of me ——ing lip he'd see I got five ——ing days C.B. Said that to me 'e did, and he only given his ——ing stripe two ——ing days before. The ——er."

"An' what did you ——ing well say?"

"I give the ——er a piece of me ——ing mind I did. I said 'e could ——ing well report me to the ——ing company commander and say I'd ——ing well——"

The story wandered aimlessly on, but I counted the number of times that the adjective had been used in the recorded conversation given above. It was fifteen times.

Unknowingly I must have attracted the attention of the two men, because suddenly they both turned and gazed at me. The nearest grinned faintly and invited me to drink with them. In reply I suggested that they should drink with me, an idea which was promptly and gratefully accepted. Names were exchanged and in a short time we were drinking and talking on many subjects, and polite inquiries were made concerning myself and my doings. In what follows I have omitted THE adjective which was freely used. This I realized was a compliment because it meant that I had been accepted as one of themselves.

"How long have you been out?" I inquired.

"Nine months, roughly," replied Williams, a tall, pale, cadaverous man, with deep-set dark eyes and bony, blue-veined hands.

"Do you like it?"

"T'ain't so bad. But Bombay's expensive for blokes like us."

I nodded agreement.

"What do you do in your spare time? In the evenings, I mean? Do you go down to the bazaars?"

"Blimey, no," answered Garton violently. "T'ain't safe for the likes of us; besides, we ain't allowed to by orders. But us knows of one place, don't us?" He winked at his companion, who nodded. "Fine pair of girls they are, an' the whisky's cheap too. One of 'em says she was in a rajah's palace once. Funny kid she is. One day I asks 'er why she had the likes of

us, and her eyes filled with tears. Then one evening I must have been particular loving because she tol' me in 'er funny bat [language]."

The man then baldly told the following story. It shocked me deeply and the more so on hearing it from such a source. Knowing the state and locality in question (not mentioned in this book) I will dress up the story because naked facts, unless they are given by word of mouth, are naked.

The huge rambling palace stood facing a small lake beyond which were low hills covered with thin jungle in which lived many wild animals. The maharajah was old-fashioned, and as a result the palace was a place of dark, crooked passages, mysterious rooms, and a hive of fierce intrigue, where every known Oriental vice was freely practised.

One of the evening amusements of the ruler was sadistic and from it he derived much pleasure. At the far end of the lake was a small neck of land which jutted out into the water. On this spot every afternoon was tied a goat, and, in due course, a large leopard came down out of the hills to take his evening meal. The maharajah, with a pair of powerful field-glasses, watched every gruesome movement of the leopard as it slew the crying goat: there was the stealthy forward crawl, the terror of the goat at approaching death, the blow, and the tearing out of the animal's throat.

In the palace lived Moti Begum. Moti Begum was seventeen and pretty and she had a small child who was all her life and soul. One day Moti Begum had the dire misfortune to gravely offend her lord. He, instead of having her quietly strangled, conceived a

new idea and one which he knew would give infinite pleasure.

The following afternoon two boats put out on to the lake ; in one was the maharajah, and in the other was poor Moti Begum, her arms secured behind her and her feet tied together. On the piece of land where the leopard came each evening for his meal was tied not a goat, but Moti's baby.

The afternoon faded, the sun set behind the hills and the boats rocked gently in the cool, lovely sunset. Like the shadow which was creeping across the calm water of the lake came the leopard. The maharajah gave an order and the men in the boat beside poor Moti Begum forced her to look up and watch the scene. The maharajah rubbed his hands in glee, not sure which to watch the more closely—the agony of the mother, or the animal dealing with its prey.

Closer and closer came the leopard. It stopped, lifted its head in surprise, and looked around for the usual goat. Then it saw the child, approached it, smelt it all over, and turning away in disgust vanished into the undergrowth.

“ And what happened to the child ? ” I inquired.

“ Gor' blimey,” exclaimed the man who had told the story. “ I forgot to ask 'er.”

This yarn broke the thread of our conversation and, suddenly realizing how drab the place was, I thanked the soldiers, got up from my table, and went away.

This story reminded me of another concerning India's rajahs, but one which has an element of humour about it.

One day in the huge, modernized palace of the ruler of the state the electric light plant failed, and it did so

on a particularly hot evening. Under the motionless electric fans the maharajah grew warmer and warmer, and more and more exasperated. The chief state electrical engineer and his assistant could not be found and so A.D.C.s in high-powered cars set out to look for them. One eventually ran them to earth and took them back to the palace.

The plant was soon put in order, but the engineers, instead of being allowed to go home, were placed in a very hot and airless dungeon where they remained for twenty-four hours. The maharajah then sent for them and they staggered into The Presence exhausted by thirst and excessive perspiration.

"Now you know what I endured through your carelessness. Don't let it happen again," ordered their ruler.

Night life in Bombay has declined and the notorious Grant Road area is but a shadow of its old self, but some of the better kind of houses still exist. Standing in private grounds these places give no indication that in them is carried on the bartering of human material. Indeed, so well managed are they that if you were not aware of the kind of house you were in it is possible you might never know. Here is an account of a visit to one of them, and it is of interest, especially to those who, knowing nothing of such places, condemn them out of hand. Man is as he is, and no laws can, or ever will, curb his instincts.

At about ten o'clock in the evening the door of one of these houses was opened by a smart Indian butler and I was shown into a charmingly furnished sitting-room. There were several large and comfortable



chairs, a few low tables on which were ash-trays, and spread on the floor were rich Chinese rugs into which the feet sank pleasantly. In one corner there was a huge standard lamp and shade and a grand piano. Near the tall windows were a deep chesterfield and a radio gramophone. The light was softly glowing and the decoration that of the pastel shades of green and primrose.

After a few moments' pause Madam swept into the room and we shook hands. A fair, tall, handsome woman, she moved with the grace and poise of a baroness.

"How nice of you to come and see me!" she said with the faintest trace of a foreign accent. "Please sit down. What would you like to drink? A chota peg, or a lager?"

I replied that a whisky and soda would be pleasant. Without my hostess giving any audible or visible orders a butler at once appeared carrying a tray of drinks, and with him came a dark, charming young European girl who smiled shyly.

"This is Marion," said Madam, introducing us. "She plays the piano very sweetly. Would you like to hear some music?"

Helping myself to a drink I said that I should be delighted.

"And now you must excuse me," said my hostess, getting up from her chair. "You understand? I have other guests."

I smiled, nodded, and lay back in my chair whilst the girl sat down at the piano and opened the keyboard.

"What would you like?" she inquired, looking across the instrument at me.

“What about the Melody in F?” I suggested.

The girl nodded as if she had expected a request of this nature and began to play. For the next fourteen minutes I sat lost to everything but the delicious stream of music. This girl owned a rare touch, using the soft pedal and managing to show much of herself in the music that she played from memory. An elfish fun showed itself in bursts of delightful chords which I am sure were not a part of the pieces she played. There followed ‘Autumn,’ the ‘Liebestraum,’ and an unknown work which she would not name.

Madam’s return into the room brought me back to realities with a disconcerting jerk, and the girl, with a slight inclination of her head, got up from the piano.

“Does she not play charmingly?” suggested Madam.

“She plays better than almost anyone I know. Like a true artist she expresses herself,” I replied.

Marion smiled her thanks and left the room. In a few moments another girl appeared. She was short, fair, and with no pretence to good looks, but she had a jolly smile and naughty, twinkling eyes.

“This is Louise,” said Madam. “She will tell you your fortune.”

Sitting beside me in the chesterfield Louise held my upturned palm in her own and gazed down into it in silence. Then she told me many things, some of which were quite true, glancing up now and again into my face with those most naughty eyes. She ended the telling with one remark which startled and amused me.

“Before you come back to this country you will have a son,” she said, laughing and dropping my hand.

“But I shall never, never, come back to India when once I have left it.”

"Ah, yes. But you will most certainly. Perhaps more than once."

We both laughed, but Madam, who had been sitting near at hand, nodded her head.

"Yes, Louise is not often wrong in what she tells. You will return and we shall doubtless meet again."

As I write this I am on my way to fulfil this astonishing statement.

Louise departed and her place was taken by Ella, and then by Fifi. A few gramophone records were played and I drank several more chota peps. Madam and I then sat and talked. I think the great Government of India would have been deeply shocked and surprised by this woman's knowledge of its secrets, some serious, but others so absurd as to be ludicrous.

The time came for me to go and I said good night to Madam. On the way to the front door I paid the butler for my drinks: I paid heavily, very heavily, but it had been worth it. Not the faintest hint had been given that the house contained other rooms, but had I remarked to Madam that Louise, or Marion, was charming, things would have happened swiftly. As it was I went out into the night having spent a thoroughly enjoyable evening in an atmosphere far more cultured than that in the homes of those who would condemn me for visiting such a house.

Before luncheon on Christmas Day I walked down to the docks and went aboard the P. & O. liner to keep my promise of the night before. In the smoking-room a large party was in progress and my appearance was the signal for a display of exaggerated pleasure on the part of my hosts. Rarely at any party have I seen so

much drink present. The table at which I was told to sit was a square one and it was entirely covered with glasses, some full and some empty, but there was enough gin available to drown at least one of the party.

We sat, and smoked, and drank, and told stories, none of which could appear in print. There was one, however, which, with censoring, can be produced, because it is typical of certain cross-sections of life in India. It was told by a man who had recently come down from Kashmir.

Not far from the capital of Kashmir on one of the many lakes was a large house-boat, and living in it were a man and his wife and her male friend (a by no means unusual trio in this country). The house-boat was moored about twenty yards from the bank and connected to it by a long plank on supports. The water between the boat and the shore was about three feet deep and beneath it was a layer of deep and glue-like mud.

The husband was a pleasant, easy-going person, but at last even he began to suspect that his wife and her male friend were becoming too intimate. One afternoon the three of them were in the sitting-room at one end of the boat when the wife suddenly asked her husband to go to the far end and fetch an album of snapshots. He went, but on the way he wondered why he should have been sent upon such an errand at such a time. On the return journey he paused in the adjoining room and peeped through a crack in the match-boarding. He saw what he expected to see: the man and the woman were fondling each other in a very affectionate manner.

Quietly the husband loaded a six-chambered revolver

and, appearing suddenly in the doorway, he held it at the ready position and ground his teeth in a fearsome manner. The lover glanced up and stared at him in horror for a few moments and then, almost in one movement, he went straight through a window on the shore side of the boat. Landing with a great splash in the shallow water he started to plough his way through the mud.

The husband, pushing his wife roughly aside, leaned out of the window and took careful aim with his weapon. He placed a shot in the water a few inches from the man's right shoulder. With a deadly fear in his heart the flying would-be lover jumped convulsively. Another shot landed close to his left shoulder. Fighting madly to lift his legs more swiftly from out of the devilishly clinging mud, the man staggered forward with painful slowness. First one leg was pulled out with much effort, then followed the other. His trousers gave way and became entangled about his knees, and he tore them off by ripping them in pieces as he sobbed with fright and exasperation. Each time he moved forward a shot landed somewhere near his body. Would the shore never be reached? As the last bullet flew past his head he crawled exhausted up the bank minus his trousers, socks and shoes, and underwear.

Waving the revolver in farewell, the husband shouted :

“ And let that be a lesson to you never to play with other men's wives.”

In the heart of the European portion of the city is the well-known Gymkhana Club with its pleasant

building and extensive grounds. A chance met acquaintance took me off to this club on the day after Christmas to watch a cricket match before luncheon.

I have always considered cricket to be a dull game both to play and to watch, but if there is one time better than another to watch it being played it is after a late and hectic night; you are then able to lie and doze in your chair, or even to snore in deep sleep without anyone nearby being unduly outraged.

On the long veranda overlooking the playing-field I was seated in a chair and a long, cold lager was produced whilst my acquaintance went off to prepare to take part in the game. Idly and for several minutes I allowed myself to gaze with some show of interest upon the white-clad figures walking out to their positions, and then my thoughts drifted away, as I knew they would do.

Before me was the spacious velvet green of the ground and beyond it were tall trees edging two sides and bounded by two main roads on which busy traffic moved to and fro, including noisy tramcars, motor cars, and fat babus on bicycles. It was *pleasantly warm and the sun blazed down out of a sun-bleached sky*. Beyond those trees, straight to my front and several miles distant, was Colaba, one of the oldest of the military cantonments where the old-fashioned but comfortable bungalows standing in their luxurious gardens are now overlooked by garish modern blocks of flats built on the famous reclamation of Back Bay.

The Back Bay reclamation scheme, begun many years ago, was a splendidly conceived idea and the

work proceeded rapidly under the encouragement of Lord Lloyd, who was then Governor of Bombay. Something, however, went wrong with the finances, or the plans, and the work was held up whilst evil-minded people said unpleasant things about all of those concerned in the scheme. The work is, however, once again going forward slowly.

On the far side of Back Bay is the famous Malabar Hill on which stand the palaces of the merchant princes, Government House, and the gruesome Towers of Silence.

Government House is naturally the social focal point, or at least it was when I last visited it. Here the well-born tourists arriving in the port, armed with shoals of letters of introduction, go to stay and live free during their sojourn. If the Governor fails to entertain them as they consider is their due, letters of bitter complaint are written home and the unfortunate governor has to explain his reasons in writing. To be asked to dine, or to attend a dance, at Government House is interesting because you see for the first time something of the pomp and circumstance which surrounds the governments of the provinces.

Still farther to the right, and a long way from Malabar Hill, are the great cotton mills which are the scene of so much industry, turbulence, and source of wealth to the city. Then come the miles of docks where the work rarely ceases and ships from all the oceans congregate.

At this point I smiled. How incongruous it was that I should be sitting in the middle of this great, teeming Eastern city idly watching a game of cricket much as I should do on an English village green.

But once again my thoughts drifted away and centred about the Towers of Silence.

This fictitious sketch describes the functions of these towers on Malabar Hill and it is a reasonably accurate description of what takes place, and is no worse than a lurid thriller. Sensitive readers might skip it.

Young Mowkerjee was the eldest son of a well-to-do Bombay Parsee family who were a happy group, trading and living at peace with all men. Mowkerjee was nineteen and slim, with an olive skin, large dark eyes, and regular features. He was learning his father's business, but often he would take his sister to dance at one of the great hotels. She was lovely, with a purely oval face framed in deeply black hair. He noticed that many Europeans looked at her with frank admiration, especially when she wore one of her best saris and looked like a butterfly.

For several days Mowkerjee had not been feeling well; the figures in his father's office danced before his eyes, and he slept badly at night. One evening he became worse, sank into a coma, and eventually died. There was dire lamentation in the house of Mowkerjee.

In the late afternoon the procession of the dead arrived at the well-kept grounds on Malabar Hill and wound its way up the broad road towards the Towers of Silence. It was inside these roofless towers that the Parsee dead were placed, because, reverencing fire, earth, and water, the dead must not be allowed to defile these elements. The towers were round, many yards in circumference, and the whitewashed walls rose to a height of thirty or forty feet and on their



tops sat numerous vultures nodding sleepily in the warmth of the late afternoon.

In due course all that was left of young Mowkerjee was taken over by the keepers of a tower. A small iron door was opened and he was taken inside and placed naked on the sloping grille. The door was slammed and relocked. The vultures would do their work and in a short time his bones would be whitening under the blazing sun to be pushed ultimately into the central pit where they would crumble into dust broken up by the weight of fresh arrivals.

It was dawn when Mowkerjee came to life again. Opening his eyes he gazed up into the soft grey of the sky. Where was he? Why did his bed seem to be so hard? Sighing, he closed his eyes and slept. An hour later he awoke. Turning his head to the right he found himself looking into the eye of a large vulture which was standing three feet away and was regarding him with what might almost be called interest. At that moment there was a flapping of wings and another vulture arrived beside the first and it closed its wings with metallic rustlings.

Slowly and with a dawning horror creeping over his consciousness Mowkerjee sat up. It was, however, some time before he fully realized the ghastly position that he was in. He saw at his feet a small, tumbled heap of bones beside which was a skull whose eyeless sockets were turned towards him. To his left, and almost touching him, were the partly devoured remains of a body. Beyond, and in fact wherever he looked, were corpses lying in distorted positions, and standing beside several of them were vultures.

Mowkerjee screamed in terror. He continued his

screaming until he fainted. He regained consciousness and screamed again. Staggering to his feet he half turned about and so caught sight of the iron door. Falling to his knees he crawled towards it and beat upon it with frenzied energy. His knuckles became torn and bloodstained, his eyes were wide and distraught, and his black hair fell across his bloodless forehead.

The minutes passed, but no one heard the cries of young Mowkerjee.

A few minutes after ten o'clock an aged keeper of the towers was walking in the grounds close to one of the whitewashed walls. His daughter had that past night given birth to a son and he was well content. Suddenly from a compact bush a few feet away from where he was walking there came the sound of a sharp whack and the upper leaves quivered in agitation. Mildly wondering what could have caused this unusual occurrence, the old man went up to the bush and examined it. Pushing aside the upper leaves he was astounded to see a large human bone lying amid the twigs. Dragging it out he gazed at it and was dumbfounded. Such a thing had never happened within his memory. Where could this bone have come from?

Turning his head slowly, his lips moving in and out, he looked up at the nearby tower. Whilst doing so he noticed that several of the vultures standing on the top were showing signs of agitation as they bent their necks and peered downwards into the tower. Looking down at the bone once again the keeper saw that it was an old one and almost white. The mystery deepened.

Still clutching the bone the keeper trotted up the

slope towards the tower. Arriving at the iron door he put an ear to it and listened. There was no sound from the interior. Fumbling for his keys he found that he had left them in his house. When the keys had been found the keeper returned accompanied by two companions, and the door was opened. They went inside. The mystery of the bone was never explained because young Mowkerjee was now really dead.

## CHAPTER XI

THE time arrived at last to leave Bombay, return to Sind, and await the boat which was to take me back to England from the port of Karachi.

The train for the north left at a late hour in the evening and, unaware of the great distance to the station, I left the hotel in what I considered was plenty of time to catch the mail train. The taxi-cab went on, and on, and on, and still we did not arrive. There are few occasions when the minutes slip by more quickly than when you realize that you are likely to be late for a train. The vehicle you are in appears to crawl, and many are the oath-producing obstacles met with on the road.

With about two minutes to spare I leapt out of the taxi at this distant station, paid the driver, and bullied two porters into snatching up my belongings. We tore into the great central hall and made a frenzied dash down a platform which appeared to be about half a mile in length. I and the baggage were bundled into a carriage and the train pulled out.

Breathing heavily I sat down on a seat and realized that I had not one drop of liquid with me in the carriage. This knowledge, and the result of the heat-producing dash, made me long for a village pond; within an hour I could have lapped up the Ganges. It was not until one o'clock in the morning that I managed to get a drink, and in doing so nearly

missed my connection at a junction. I should certainly not care to die of thirst.

The remainder of the journey to Hyderabad, in Sind, was hot, dusty, and uneventful. Having described Hyderabad in a recent book I cannot do so again, but I will deal with another aspect of Indian life which is all too infrequently mentioned, and which applies particularly to such places as Hyderabad.

In the scattered cantonment area with its two dreary roads and bungalows squatting in their dusty compounds, the heat, glare, and desolation all combined to shock me once again and made me realize the drabness of the lives of those who live in India.

As human beings we were meant to be happy, and in our own queer ways we do strive after happiness, but what a mess is made of these abortive efforts in India. It seems to me that the main cause of failure in people to live contented lives in the tropics is that most of them have too much mental leisure. There are, of course, many men and a few women who do work hard, both physically and mentally, but speaking generally this is not the case and few realize the truth of what Lord Elton said recently in one of his broadcast talks.

"Happiness is a virtue. It is our right to be happy, but happiness only comes when the soul is discharging its true function."

To illustrate this point we will examine a typical married couple in any bungalow, in any cantonment area, be it an Indian state or in a military station.

In the bungalow live Mr. and Mrs. Smith who have been married for some years and have a son at school at home. The bungalow is large, reasonably

well furnished, and there are a host of servants in attendance. Smith is an average husband, but several years in India have caused Mrs. Smith to begin to fade, and she knows it.

After breakfast Smith goes off to his office, or to a parade-ground, leaving his wife alone in the bungalow. He does his work reasonably well, he may even be deeply interested in it. Whilst he is away Mrs. Smith talks to the cook, helps the bearer for a short time, arranges some flowers, or writes a note to a woman friend. Then she glances at the morning paper. By this time it is ten o'clock. At eleven o'clock Mabel Jones is due to arrive for a chat. To fill in the time she does a little needlework, reads a book, or writes to her son. But writing letters to Peter is a difficult business. First, what is she to say that has not been said a hundred times before? Secondly, that vivid picture of the last time she saw him never entirely fades and it rises up every time she begins a letter to him. It is of a forlorn little figure standing on the steps of his preparatory school trying very hard to be brave. He waves feebly to her as she leans far out of the window of the car as it moves away down the drive. Her husband had not seemed to mind on that dreadful day. He had sat looking straight ahead and only grunted when she wept into an already sodden handkerchief.

At eleven o'clock Mabel Jones arrives and the two women sit on the veranda where they drink tea or 'soft drinks' as they discuss station affairs and arrange to play tennis that afternoon after tea at the club.

At one o'clock Smith returns to luncheon, a meal dreadfully similar to many past ones.

"What are you doing this afternoon?" he inquires of his wife.

"I'd arranged to play tennis with Mabel Jones at the club at half-past four. What are you doing? Polo?"

"No. I think I'll have a game of squash with Brey at the club. By the way, aren't we dining with the Browns to-night?"

"Yes."

"Who is going to be there?"

"Oh, the usual crowd. But the general is going, I hear."

"Oh, damn! Is he? Well, it can't be helped. But you be careful what you say if you play bridge with him. I don't want any trouble in that quarter."

"What do you mean?" inquires Mrs. Smith sharply.

"Well, you aren't always very tactful when things go wrong, are you?"

Mrs. Smith bites back a stinging answer and the meal goes on to finish in silence.

Smith now either returns to his office or they both go off to their beds to read, or doze, until tea-time. In due course, after the tennis is over at the club, Mrs. Smith and her partner sit and look at the illustrated papers whilst her husband, hot from his game of squash racquets, has a bath and then sits at the club bar and drinks several whiskies and sodas with his partner. At seven o'clock he glances at his watch, says he must go, seeks out his wife, and they both return to the bungalow to change for dinner. At eight-thirty they arrive at the bungalow where they are to dine. The assembly closely resembles

any other such party and the food and conversation run on strictly regulated lines. Bridge, or some parlour game, follows and at eleven-thirty the Smiths return home and go to bed.

This is a daily routine and it is followed, with small variations, for many months on end. Neither the man nor the woman is happy, or even contented, and both have long since given up hope of ever being so. Smith is, however, secretly pleased that he is able to get along with his wife without continual bickering. He knows that the station regards them as a happily married couple and many are envious of them.

In due course Mrs. Smith goes up to the hills and Smith becomes a bachelor. He does a little shooting, plays polo, and races mildly. He drinks more than he should, misses his wife at night, and is bored and vaguely unhappy. Mrs. Smith in the hills carries on her usual routine, but living in an hotel, or a boarding-house, she has more time than ever upon her hands. She dances a good deal, and flirts mildly with one or two men up from the plains on leave.

After several years of this existence the Smiths go home on leave. They return and live as before.

How should a man and wife so placed seek happiness? Here is my answer. They should get together and work on a combined creation. They should work with a dogged persistence which overcomes setbacks, sweeps away obstacles, and chokes down all feelings of failure or depression. What they arrange to create matters little, be it art, music, a garden, or the welfare of those among whom they live, as long as it fills not a part, but the whole of their leisure hours.

I will go as far as to say that not one European



man or woman in every ten who lives in India to-day ever strives, however feebly, to create anything, except, perhaps, the human race. They exist and nothing more, and mainly they do not even trouble to try and exist as pleasantly as possible, often being bored, bad-tempered, immoral, or just 'plain stupid.'

This may sound bitter, but is no more than the truth and I defy anyone to say that it is exaggerated.

We will go a step further and deal briefly with the problem which faces the young, unmarried man in India. His plight is lamentable and few offer a helping hand, preferring to leave him to work out his own salvation rather than be embarrassed by a few straight talks.

In India, or indeed the tropics as a whole, the ever-present sex urge can, and does, destroy any chances of approach to real contentment of mind, or happiness, in the young. It is said that happiness is not for youth, but the reward of experience later in life: this I believe to be not only nonsense, but criminal nonsense.

Faced with the sex urge, which has increased alarmingly since his arrival in India, youth falls back on its public-school training which lays down that when the urge is upon him it must be dispelled by violent and, if necessary, prolonged physical exercise. This has two results, neither satisfactory to the problem that we are considering. If a wise and reasonable amount of exercise is taken it increases the fitness of the body and in consequence strengthens the sex urge. Secondly, if the exercise is grossly overdone, as it often is, then the body is weakened and ailments result.

Youth is told that ball games, shooting, and sport generally all combine to defeat this urge. This is, of course, true, but these pastimes do not lead to any continued contentment of mind, because the sex problem is one which has to be faced during those hours which everyone spends alone in his bungalow when the soul should be serene and not vexed by restlessness and vague longings.

Youth should be told that the answer to this universal question is to be found not so much on the physical side as on the mental. If the mind can be forced to concentrate on some creative work which involves the use of the hands as well as the brain, sex is at once pushed into the background ; it cannot, of course, be entirely thrown out. It should, however, be regarded as a slumbering beast of prey, ever ready to pounce and destroy our peace of mind, and the food on which this beast thrives is boredom. It must be forced into submission by the whip of mental concentration.

It must not be thought that the first steps towards real concentration are easy, but if real and successive efforts are made then success will come and the avenue to contentment be opened up.

It was at this time that an amusing story concerning a certain provincial governor was whispered to me ; it was then not considered delicate to mention it aloud.

This governor decided to make a tour of his province and, in consequence, Government House at once became the scene of unusual bustle and agitation. The military secretary, the A.D.C., and other officials

conferred anxiously together and elaborate arrangements were made so that everything should run smoothly during the great man's journeyings.

The day of departure arrived and Their Excellencies drove to the station where the special train was standing. The platform was crowded with well-wishers and the Governor and his wife, after many gracious smiles and hand-shakes, took their places in the train.

The journey involved the crossing of a dusty, cold desert. In spite of every comfort His Excellency slept badly on that first night, tossing and turning, and clearing dust out of his eyes, nose, and ears. At an early hour in the morning the train halted at a small station. Here, clad in a dressing-gown and a pair of bedroom slippers, the Governor (in some manner never satisfactorily explained) avoided the notice of the double guards posted on either side of his coach, and stepped out on to the platform to stretch his legs. The train at this point had to be shunted to and fro and the engine hitched on to the other end to permit the journey to be continued on a branch line.

The Governor watched these proceedings for a few moments and then strolled to the far end of the platform. Turning, he watched the train draw out of the station, but instead of returning it continued upon its way, the tail light becoming dim until it vanished around a bend in the line. For a moment the outraged governor could not believe his eyes. The impossible had happened. He, His Excellency the Governor of the Province, had been left behind standing on an empty, rather cold, wayside station. Quivering with rage he trotted up the platform to the station-master's office where he faced that astonished official.

His Excellency, in a voice of doom, ordered him instantly to stop the train. The station-master, however, refused to believe that this apparition was the Governor and he would not do as he was ordered, having mistaken him for some minor official from off the train.

"But I am the Governor, you double-dyed fool," shouted His Excellency in extreme exasperation.

"The sahib jests," countered the man blandly. "The Governor Sahib Bahadur sleeps like a little child in his too magnificent coach."

Becoming more and more enraged the Governor frantically tried to think of some means whereby he could identify himself. He was saved at last by a policeman coming into the office, recognizing him, and saluting smartly. The station-master was aghast. What would be the result of this hideous mistake? The train had gone beyond all hope of recall.

"You have got to do something, you, you——" cried His Excellency, so enraged as to forget all suitable names to call the trembling station-master.

After a prolonged wait an inspection trolley was produced from a nearby yard, together with six coolies to push it. The night was chilly and the Governor lightly clad and so he was persuaded to accept the policeman's cape-like coat. He took his seat on the hard board, and with the coolies pushing he started up the line to find his train.

In the meanwhile the train, now some twenty miles distant, was found to be devoid of its principal occupant. Panic and confusion reigned. His Excellency had been kidnapped; had fallen off the train; and was lying most foully done to death beside the line.

Pulling into a station maddened officials surged into the telegraph office and entirely blocked the line by sending off sheaves of telegrams. (Scanned afterwards they made interesting reading.)

Her Excellency was distraught, the Military Secretary was wild-eyed, and the A.D.C. almost in tears when there came a shout which brought everyone running to the end of the platform. His Excellency had reappeared. With ominous calm the Governor stepped off his undignified perch on to the platform, strode in silence down the train and vanished into his coach. The onlookers were left to guess what had occurred. They were far too upset even to smile.

It was my intention to end this book at this point, but as I write these concluding words I am once again in Bombay and in war-time. Life in the city runs much as it always has done, and outwardly there are few traces of the effects of war to be seen. Prohibition to the European population is, however, like a badly aching tooth.

Before it is possible to obtain even the smallest quantity of liquor allowed a costly permit has to be got and produced each time an alcoholic drink is required. The result of this is that European business has suffered badly because, as at home, many a successful deal is conducted over a glass of beer or spirits. Only the mentally unstable could visualize two hard-headed business men sitting in an empty bar discussing a transaction over a glass of lemon squash.

The great hotels like the 'Taj Mahal' are fighting bravely to keep their heads above water, but the odds against them are staggering, because night life is

almost non-existent and war has cut off completely all tourist traffic.

I am told on good authority that the loss in revenue to the Government on account of prohibition will be such that the Congress Party will be forced out of power and that the ban will be lifted in March of next year, when the financial year ends and the figures are produced for all to study. In the meanwhile the European community does not suffer in silence. There was a dance given recently at Government House, where only fruit drinks were offered, and, in consequence, the affair was voted to be thoroughly lugubrious and people did not mind saying so.

It was a Sunday morning and I was sitting on the deck of the troopship when a ship's officer came up to me.

"Let's go places," suggested the Troop Officer. (A ship's officer who is a go-between the military commander and the ship's master, and he is generally known as Troops.)

"All right. Where?" I replied, glancing up from my newspaper.

"Across to Elephanta Island to see the caves." Troops then described in lurid detail the improper carvings he hoped to see in these caves.

Elephanta Island lies on the far side of Bombay Harbour and on it are numerous caves which are said to be of much interest, being filled with Hindu carving of great age. The distance from the docks across to this island is about six miles, and so the mode of transport had to be considered. Several of the ship's officers, including the chief engineer, various wireless

officers, and the chief steward, were consulted and, as is usual in such cases, they all gave conflicting advice. The ship's launch could not be used for several reasons, a tourist agency required too high a fee, and various contractors were unable to let us have the use of a launch. To clinch the matter I went off and hired a large and comfortable sailing boat of a local brand which was to come to the steps close to the ship at 2 p.m. that afternoon.

At the appointed hour our party of eight foregathered at the gangway. There were the Troop Officer, a small, good-looking person of character, but with a mind so low as to make you think of sanitary inspectors and their work; the second officer, an amiable fellow, who ran Troops a close second in lowness of mind; three wireless officers and an electrical engineer; the ship's doctor, an aged but charming person who said little but smiled often; and, finally, myself.

Taking our places in the sailing boat the excursion began and I noticed that no form of liquid had been brought, in spite of earlier agreement on this important matter. When hiring the boat that morning I had pointed out to the plump and talkative owner that there was no wind, but he assured me that by the time we started in the afternoon there would be plenty. Either he lied to me, or the elements had cheated him, because as we pushed off from the steps there was hardly a puff strong enough to make itself felt. The tall and pointed sail was unfurled, but it flapped in a weary, depressed manner, and so five of the crew produced strange-looking oars and began their long period of rowing.

Squatting on the tiny poop behind me as he held the tiller-handle was an ancient, and it was difficult to realize that any human being could be so thin, dried up, and aged. His black, gas-pipe-like legs were crossed, and it was a claw which gripped the tiller-handle. All that remained of his teeth were two very long ones in front, and one of our party expressed the desire to see him spear a pickled onion with them. In spite of his decrepitude this hardly human person owned a pair of black, very much alive eyes which regarded me with speculative malevolence whenever I turned my head in his direction.

It was a glorious afternoon as we slipped easily, but slowly, across the calm water. In the shade it had been delightfully cool, but seated as we were, protected from the blazing sun by only a thin piece of white canvas above our heads, it was distinctly hot and it was not long before several of the party were panting for liquid in any form.

An hour passed, followed by another, and we began to wonder if we would ever reach the island, which from the ship's side had seemed comparatively close. Even 'Troops' quick wit, improper stories, and jests, died away and we sat silently watching the coast-line of the island which at last grew distinct in detail. On it were a few scattered huts, whilst the northern end rose to a small peak covered in trees and vegetation, and above it in the clear sky was an ever-changing cloud of vultures.

Rounding a sharp point we came to where a long flight of shallow steps led down from the low foreshore and crossed a stretch of black mud covered with small boulders of volcanic origin. Once ashore we came



upon a rough piece of roadway which led up and across the point and then descending it skirted the forshore on which, scrabbling amid the rocks and mud left by a very low tide, was the picturesque figure of a woman dressed in dull red and yellow clothes. The road then turned inland and began to rise and entered a fertile little valley which was covered with fields. Thickly growing vegetation and high grasses fringed the roadside, and velvet-skinned cows grazed sleepily on both sides, and young goats leapt into startled activity at the sight of us.

On the steep hill-side to the right came a huddle of native dwellings surrounded by large trees with spreading branches in which was stored the local crop of hay. Fat bundles of honey-coloured grasses were stacked on the lower branches of these trees and each resembled a gigantic nest. This method of using trees as hay-ricks was an entirely new one to me and a thoroughly sensible one it was, because it kept the crop dry and sweet and well out of the reach of hungry and wandering cattle and goats.

Toiling up the increasingly steep roadway we mopped our brows and wondered where the caves had hidden themselves. Affliction then descended upon us in the form of many brats, brats of all ages and sizes, ranging from a few inches high to three feet. The tiny females had large black eyes and no clothes at all, whilst the boys, equally unclad, grinned and tried to sell us primitive walking-sticks. All howled for 'Baksheesh' in a manner not unlike a nightmare Greek chorus. One little varmint repeated this devilish word as if he were a gramophone record whose needle had become stuck in a groove and

refused to move out of it. I slapped his little backside in desperation and the damnable word was replaced by roars of surprised lamentation as he fled up the hillside. His mother popped out of a hut and regarded us balefully.

At last, and after a particularly steep rise, the road ended in the grounds before the caves. Hot, but expectant, we approached the main cave. This was broad and deep, but the roof was low, being not more than twenty feet in height, and rows of bloated pillars gave the effect of supporting it. Around the walls were the remains of many Hindu carvings cut out of the rock-faces. They showed the doings of the Hindu gods, and once they must have been very fine, but they were now grievously mutilated.

Our party wandered about looking hopefully at these shrines until at last someone raised his voice and gave expression to the general disappointment by stating that there was nothing to see. By this he meant nothing in the least improper, and it was true. There were several other minor caves, but these were devoid of interest.

On the return journey we agreed that the sail across the harbour had been pleasant, and so we had not wasted the afternoon. The cloud of children pounced upon us again, but this time we were highly amused by Troops who suggested to a much embarrassed wireless officer that he should catch up and carry off to the ship a naked, pert little maiden who was badgering us for money. Troops pointed out with much intimate detail all the girl's charms. The small person gave some colour to the suggestion by appearing to be fascinated by the wireless officer in question,

clinging to his side and causing him to become very red in the face from annoyance and embarrassment.

On nearing the landing-stage our attention was attracted by an unusual spectacle. Standing on the lower slopes of the hill-side above us were several young goats. These animals were being teased by a number of large crows who were making determined efforts to settle on the goats' backs and they were strongly resenting this impertinence. The birds, squawking loudly, would almost achieve their aims, but they were frustrated by the goats springing round and trying to butt them. The crows would rise up as if on springs and the game began again. One goat did just catch the tail feathers of one crow with his head, and the bird, shrieking with annoyance, flew away to preen the ruffled tail.

Once again in the sailing boat we found that a strong breeze was blowing so that the crew were able to take a well-earned rest from their rowing.

The sun sank rapidly behind the skyline of the distant city, empurpling it against a background of the deepest crimson. We slid across a ruffled water in a golden haze, where the lazily-moving dhows, and steamers at anchor, were figures of a poet's imagination.

The swiftly arriving night then wiped out the colours of sunset, but a rising full moon turned our troubled wake to bubbling silver.

Once aboard the ship we hurried off, very late, in search of dinner and the much-needed liquid.

Dinner on board the ship was long over, and Troops and I sat on deck looking over the harbour towards the

distant islands and the mainland. It was a lovely night, with a full moon and a soft, warm breeze coming in from the north. We were discussing the oldest profession in the world, and Troops surprised me by stating that he had never been down to the brothel area of Grant Road, where the cages are. I thereupon told him that his education had been neglected and that we would go off at once and inspect the place.

A taxi rushed across the city and took us down into the depths of the great bazaars and finally dropped us at the junction of several ill-lighted streets. Choosing the widest of these streets, we walked along it and came upon the first row of cages. There were twenty-three in this place, where each resembled its neighbour, and all were abodes of outlawed carnalism.

A cage consisted of a single room about twenty feet in depth and ten feet wide. Instead of a door facing the pavement there was a double wooden framework which had let into it slim iron bars, instead of panels. This permitted prospective customers to inspect and be inspected. The forward portion of the room was screened off from the rear by long curtains, beyond which it was possible to see the large double bed. In the space before the curtain there were chairs and tables, and it was here that the inmates awaited customers. In most cases there were three or four women present, and they sat on the chairs, or tended their hair before the mirrors, or leaned against the bars and gazed out with roving eyes on to the passers-by on the roadway.

A few of the women were fat and ageing, but mainly they were tall, slim, and not uncomely, although all of them were very dark-skinned. As far as it was

possible to judge, they looked clean and well cared for, and in every case the jet-black hair was tightly drawn back over the head, where it shone like wet seaweed. Each inmate wore a full skirt, a tight bodice, and over the shoulders a shawl was gracefully draped. Many wore flowers behind their ears, and some were hung about with heavy silver ornaments.

We walked slowly down the pavement and Troops was amusingly divided between interest and repulsion. He even pretended that he was horrified when I talked to some of the women in their own language. One fine, upstanding wench spoke English which she had obviously picked up from seamen and such like.

"Hullo," I said.

"You come in, yes ? "

"How much ? "

"For you, two rupees."

"No, that's too expensive. Eight annas [ninepence]."

This produced a gust of laughter, and the woman explained the jest to her companions who crowded about the bars.

I took Troops' arm.

"Now this sahib is a fine one. He love you very much. He is not large, but indeed he is like an elephant."

This evoked a scream of laughter resembling that of an outraged peacock, whilst Troops tore himself away from me, annoyed and embarrassed. The girl, however, thrust a long arm covered in glass bangles through the bars and caught him by the lapel of his coat.

"I like you. Damn. I love you. Come in. I charge nothing."

Troops, thoroughly scandalized, hurried away, and, laughing, I followed him. A stream of most unladylike language followed us down the street. As nearly as I dare translate it I was described as being a castrated devil who performed quite unmentionable deeds.

Soon becoming bored with the area, I suggested that we made for a main, brightly-lighted street which had been crossed when in the taxi. The brothels were soon left behind and the street became an ordinary one. When nearing its end we came upon an extraordinary sight. In a corner made by a brick wall, and under the bright light from a street lamp, was a tall and ghostly form. Covering entirely what was obviously a human form was a long, coloured shawl. The outline of the form seen from an angle was bent double, and the top of the back was at least six feet from the ground. In rear the shawl touched the pavement, but in front it fell only a few feet. Peering closely, we saw a thin leg and a clawlike hand just appearing below the edge of the shawl.

"What in the name of goodness is that?" enquired Troops.

"As far as I can see, it is a misshapen beggar who is somehow supported on a single crutch," I replied.

"But why is it perched so high off the ground?"

"Just to make it more impressive."

"Well, it certainly succeeds," said Troops, shuddering. "I don't think I've ever seen anything quite so repulsive."

We crossed the street to where, standing well back, were several single-storied houses, each with a lighted doorway. I had just remarked to Troops, in some surprise, that here were some more brothels,

when a sprightly young female popped out of the shadows and pounced upon Troops. Hanging about his neck, she entreated him ardently, even passionately, to accompany her into one of the houses. The look of startled fury on Troops' face was so funny that I was unable to go to his aid for several moments. It was only after an undignified struggle that we managed to part from the female. Once in the safety of the brightly-lit main street Troops sighed with relief and I laughed once again.

The broad street was lined on both sides by wide pavements, numerous cinemas, and many brilliantly-lit cafés. Each café, with its small tables and chairs, was crowded. Men of all ages sat and smoked, ate, and drank gaudily-coloured mineral waters. Gramophones were in full blast, and they yowled and screeched with fine Eastern fervour.

At my suggestion we went into a large purely Indian cinema to see a much-advertised picture. This was the first of its kind that I had seen, and I was much impressed by it. It was interesting to note that the plot was exactly the same as our own old-fashioned melodrama, where the hero was big and strong and handsome, the heroine timid, and the villain truly horrific. Good conquered in the end, but not before it had had several serious setbacks. It was surprising that the direction should have been so good, and the acting so natural, and in no way stilted, as it so often is in the East.

Lying on my bunk and preparing to sleep, I thought over the events of the evening and then, without warning, a shutter clicked in my brain and I was back in England. I was in my canoe on the quiet river, not

far from my house in East Anglia. The meadows were knee-deep in rich grasses and gay with flowers. Cattle stood beneath the age-old willows. I glided along in silence, except for the splish-splosh of my paddle. Above was a clear English summer sky, and I was alone in a clean, natural, lovely land which was mine.

The contrast of this vision and my recent experiences was so outrageous that it took me off my bunk to wander restlessly up and down the moon-splashed deck.

Walking in the cool of an early evening in one of the many bazaars which begin at Crawford Market I came suddenly upon a quaint group, so unusual that I stood watching, fascinated and charmed.

The roadway was a fairly wide one and on it moved a varied and colourful procession of Indians. On the left was a water point at which a coolie woman was making a hurried toilet. Beyond her there was a long, tin, public latrine, and beside the wall of a house, and in the shade afforded by the latrine, was an aged musician. Squatting cross-legged on a large square of Isabella coloured cloth, he held between his knees a round, brass-nail-studded, long-handled, single stringed guitar. Sitting beside and facing him was a young boy wearing a red fez, but it was what was on the front edge of the cloth that claimed my attention.

Side by side were two minute, chubby, naked boys sitting with their fat little legs crossed under them. Both these fragments had closely-cropped black hair, and from their soft, rounded faces there peered out two pairs of large black eyes. Their chests and tummies were soft rolls of honey-coloured fat.

The aged musician sat with his head turned towards



his left shoulder and his sightless eyes raised to the sky. Twanging the single strand of wire he sang, his thin, goat-like, grey beard wagging to and fro, whilst the boy in the red fez acted as a muted chorus. It was, however, the left-hand infant which fascinated me. This adorable creature with great solemnity was moving its tiny, cropped head up and down, and right and left, just as if he were royalty acknowledging the plaudits of a crowd. The absurd gravity, combined with the aloof dignity of this performance, was such that rarely have I seen a more charming, or a more amusing spectacle. His companion paid no attention to the small crowd of onlookers because he, with an equal gravity, was tearing pieces out of a scrap of newspaper with his baby mouth and placing them beside his toes.

The song was ended. The grandson left off his nodding and looked down at his dimpled hands which were now playing with the thin cord tied just above his absurd navel.

Nowhere but in India does one come across such sights as these.